

Part 5: Scripture on Unity of Christians in the Church

Purpose of Congregations – Hebrews 10:24-5 Essay 1 of 2

Hebrews 10:25 is often used to urge church attendance or guilt-trip people into never missing. What is often missed is the purpose to even meet explained in the previous verse; the verses together:

"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).

While the passage does not specify frequency of assembly, it prohibits discontinuing it. The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and doing good deeds,¹ⁿ which are fruits of biblical faith. This purpose is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly, and the purpose is again mentioned afterward.

The Bible Meaning of "Church"

At Matthew 16 Jesus was speaking with His disciples, and at 16:15-8 we pick up:

"`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.²ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."³ Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα. The πέτρα was what was discussed immediately before: "'You are the [Christ], the Son of the living God.'" This is the one premise that the church is built upon: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.⁴ⁿ

The Bible meaning of "church" refers to people⁵ – nothing other.⁶ⁿ Greek translated "church" in the New Testament is εκκλησια. The New Testament-era readers would have been Greek-reading people who also used the Greek Septuagint Old Testament translation.

In ancient Greek culture, εκκλησια was used for the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁷ This resembles how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the event of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). The Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is translated "followers" in the ICB at Acts 11:26. Hence, in a basic Bible

Fixing a Misconception: Many people think that a group is 'the Lord's church' because its precepts make it 'the Lord's church.' In Scripture, precepts have no part in making a church.

¹ People who disdain church benevolence, or who would limit church benevolence to being a means to another end, miss the very purpose of church congregations.

² 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.

³ MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Life Application Bible for Students, page 924.

⁶ Many people claim a favored religious organization to be 'the Lord's church' thinking its precepts make it 'the Lord's church.' In Scripture, precepts do not make a church.

⁷ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

meaning of "Christian,"¹ⁿ the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. In this context, the Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers.

In the Greek Old Testament translation Septuagint usage, εκκλησια translated a Hebrew word designating a "gathering" of Israel for a specific purpose or a "gathering" representative of all of Israel² and also referred to the general gathering of God's people without any set purpose.³ It was used at Acts 7:38⁴ in reference to Israel at Mount Sinai when Moses was delivering the Judaic Law: "the church in the wilderness" (ASV) also rendered "the assembly in the wilderness" (TNIV). When ancient Greek-reading/hearing Christians met the word in the Greek New Testament, continued use of εκκλησια regarding Christians would have identified them as the gathered mass of God's people.

The "returning" (ASV) Ethiopian official of Acts 8:26-39 after conversion "went joyfully on his way" (NBV) to Ethiopia away from all congregations. He was a member of the church but had no congregation. Per this approved example, being part of the church does not depend on congregation.

A distinction in use of Greek words is important. Greek "συναγωγη" meant a place where Jews met to worship transliterated "synagogue."⁵ It sometimes also referred to the people who assembled there,⁶ and was used at James 2:2 in reference to physical meeting of Christians. Hence, for places of meeting and for personal meeting of Christians by locality, the New Testament has a word συναγωγη, not εκκλησια. This is helpful in understanding how we need to think of "church."

When εκκλησια is used about the church of Christians, it refers to the mass of Christians just as Israel was a nation of God's people. It also refers to the community of Jesus Christ's followers. When the church has meetings, it is a situation in which a portion of God's people = followers of Jesus Christ meet together at a place; this is the meaning of Bible 'church...at ___.' It does not mean a meeting place or people with formal attachments to the meeting place; it simply means that portion of the church.

Allow me a secular analogy. In c. 2000 Indiana, there is a community college network involving over 20 campuses. The community college has a name, and once admitted by a campus, all of its students are students of that one college regardless of which campus or campuses they attend classes at or are registered at. Students are frequently associated in college records with one campus but are attending classes at another. They are students of the community college, but they meet at particular campuses, and are students of that college regardless of where they attend classes.

In the church, God has always "added to them day by day" (ASV)⁷ⁿ per Acts 2:47. Christians are members of the entirety of the community of God's people and Jesus Christ's followers. That is who they are first, and the matter of which portion they assemble with and where is secondary.

Presently-accepted meanings aside, in New Testament Scripture's meaning, **people alone** make the church. Meeting-time/place 'doctrines' = religious tenets do **NOT** make a church. A named meeting place does **NOT** make a church. An institutionalized organization with procedures, precepts, rules, rule-makers, and governance does **NOT** make a church. Local congregations do **NOT** federate' to make the church. *Individual persons who are followers of Jesus Christ make the church.*

Warnings to Congregations in the Book of Revelation

In the first three chapters of Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ directly addresses seven congregations. Jesus says something positive to all seven, but five of those seven are reproved.

The congregation dealt with harshest is the **congregation at Laodicea**, Revelation 3:14-22

¹ Scripture at Acts 5:14, 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, 1 Timothy 6:2 uses "believers" (NASB) synonymous with 'Christians,' but never 'confessors,' 'baptized' or 'speakers in tongues.'

For more detail on meaning of "Christian," please see *Part 4/What All This Means*.

² Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 42 NT.

³ In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, pages 73, 76.

⁴ In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

⁵ In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

⁶ In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

⁷ We do not 'join' THE church by going to a congregation's meetings or attaching to one.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm— neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me. To those who are victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (TNIV)

Jesus indicates that He will "discipline" these indifferent Christians. Behold Hebrews 12:5b-10a

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his child.' Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined— and everyone undergoes discipline— then you are not legitimate children at all. Moreover, we have all had parents who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! Our parents disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good" (TNIV).

These of the Laodicea congregation of Jesus Christ's church were commended in no way. Christ said He loves them and disciplines them as His children. Every Christian is an adopted child of God, per Ephesians 1:5a "having foreordained us unto adoption as |his own children| through Jesus Christ" (ASV|ICB|ASV). At the end of the warning to the congregation at Laodicea, everyone was told to pay attention to what He said to them – we should take note of the fact that despite having nothing the Lord commended them for, they were still in His church of adopted children = Christians.

Another group is the **congregation at Ephesus**. At Revelation 2:1-7 the Lord said

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who are victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (TNIV).

This congregation was told to get back their zeal for the Lord. Unlike the congregation at Laodicea, it was commended. Considering what was said about Laodicea, and the fact that we are told to heed it, we must assume that this congregation remained in Christ's church despite its flaws.

Nicolaitans were Gnostics meshing in Christian aspects. They claimed the Christ to be distinct from Jesus, and sometime after birth this separate Christ "was descending on Jesus"¹ per 170's-180's Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book 3:11. Church-reported tenets include loose sexual relations while married² = adultery, and "abandoned themselves to pleasures" plus "shameless self-indulgence."³

Turning next to the **congregation at Pergamum**, the Lord said at Revelation 2:12-17

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put

¹ Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, page 378.

² Latourette, *History of Christianity*, page 1:460.

³ *Discovery Study Bible*, page 1665.

to death in your city— where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To those who are victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give each of them a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it" (TNIV).

They were "true to" His "name." The congregation's problem: some followed teaching to engage in worship practices to false gods, to be sexually immoral, and Nicolaitan tenets which added adultery and wantonness to the latter. Such matters were relevant to life away from congregation meetings.

Next, the Lord addressed the **congregation at Thyatira**. At Revelation 2:18-25, the Lord said

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come'" (TNIV).

This congregation was praised more, but they had the exact same sins, of the exact same type, as the congregation at Pergamum: following teaching engage in worship practices to false gods and to commit sexual immorality. Such matters affected regular life away from congregation meeting.

Finally, we come to the **congregation at Sardis**. At Revelation 3:1-4a, the Lord said

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes" (TNIV).

This congregation was told its individual members were not finishing tasks to be done for the Lord. This congregation's only commendation was 'you have a few who are doing better than most of you,' so as a whole, this congregation was not commended. However, we note that they had "a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes." This congregation had flaws, and was not getting done all the Lord wanted – yet those who were approved did assemble in this congregation and had "not soiled their clothes." At Revelation 3:6, after this address to the congregation at Sardis, the Lord Jesus Christ said "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (TNIV). Hence, this passage shows that Christians do not sin by assembling with a flawed congregation. No congregation in Revelation 2-3 is rebuked for any matter not affecting life away from church assembly, and the note to Sardis shows that flawed congregations do not by themselves have power to make anyone a sinner.

Doctrine and Its Importance: Acts, Paul, and John

2 Timothy 2:15 says "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (ASV). It is important to be studying and being sure that what we teach is correct, and that what we do in assembled worship is proper.

Let us start by noting that in the present we commonly expect good from religion, but not so in ancient times; most ancient religious systems had much allowance for immorality and evil. Let us keep in mind that Christian doctrine was in combat with this in that setting.

Let us discuss how Scripture describes "sound doctrine" (KJV) and the *Acts 2:42* "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV). Jesus said in 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). Note the "I **have taught** you" - He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. The "apostles' doctrine" would be doing exactly this. The "apostles' doctrine" is not some mysterious thing hidden in Scripture needing to be gleaned out; we can simply read the teachings of Christ or hear them read to us.

Paul was an apostle, and he did just as Jesus said at Matthew 28:19-20. At *1 Corinthians 4:17* Paul reported "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere" (NBV | ESV) - he alluded to this at Acts 20:35. He gave specifics of "apostles' doctrine" and "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 disdained favoring speculation and instruction on fine points of the Old Testament Judaic worship Law above "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Paul mandated focus on "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" and applying the Law to sins of action typically done only outside church assembly. Those non-religious sins are "contrary to sound doctrine," which was about how to conduct our lives in and out of church settings.

We turn to 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).

Here, the things that were against sound doctrine were bindings in areas that the New Testament Scriptures demonstrate approval of and are silent on condemnation of. *1 Corinthians 7* approves of marriage and *Acts 10* allows for eating of what is edible. Such bindings outside Scripture were oppressive of others, reduced thankfulness, and were told with deceitful intent = lies. Again, what was contrary to "good doctrine" were sins of action mentioned here that were typically practiced outside of church worship settings and which affected life outside of worship-specific settings.

The same train of thought is continued in *1 Timothy 4:7* with "And exercise thyself unto godliness" (ASV) and in *4:12-3* "become in speech, in behavior, in love, in faith, in purity, an example before those who believe. Till I arrive, devote yourself to the public reading, the preaching, and the teaching" (NBV), and finally *4:15-6* "Be diligent in these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy progress may be manifest unto all. Take heed unto thyself, and to thy | doctrine |. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee" (ASV | KJV | ASV). Here, Timothy's task was to be a teacher and an example of a good godly Scripturally-taught lifestyle that would please the Lord, and this was a salvation matter.

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 controversial questions**."¹ Approved doctrine, as in its other contexts in this epistle, mainly relates to how the Christian behaves in overall living – further, anyone whose focus is off this is described in strong words: "**understands nothing**."

2 *Timothy* 4:3 has "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). These people will turn to stories that are not true, which means away from Scripture entirely. These who turn from "sound doctrine" will follow "their own lusts." "Lust" refers to fleshly motivations for sins that people commit in normal life regardless of religion or lack thereof.

At *Titus* 1:9-12, we have it described 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).

Again, "sound doctrine" is opposed by people with deceptive intent. The main culprits are "of the circumcision," who tried to convince Christians that they were bound by the Judaic Law, affecting all areas of life. Paul was condemning the Judaizers, who tried to pressure everyone into following the Judaic Law.²ⁿ Per Galatians 5:4, they were teaching that salvation was through the Judaic Law – exactly like before Christ, which is why such a view meant "Christ is become of no effect" (ASV). This denied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ³ because He died to free us from subjection to the Judaic Law per Galatians 5:1. The idea that all Christians needed to follow the Judaic Law was rejected to the whole church before the New Testament was completed – Acts 15:24-29. *Galatians* 1:6-8 opposed Judaizers, who alleged an "other Good News" (ICB) that denied Christ's redemptive work, and who deliberately taught what they knew was false. Galatians 1:6-8 "let him be anathema" (ASV) refers to people who taught what they knew to be false, and who denied Christ's redemptive work.

2 *John* verse 9 warns "Whosoever |goes beyond| and abideth not in the doctrine |of the Christ| hath not God."⁴ This describes Gnostics, who thought that they had 'gnosis/knowledge beyond' that of 'common Christians.' Verse 7 explains how they did this: "Es que han salido por el mundo muchas engañadores" (NVI) = "It-is that they-have left by the world many deceivers" who are "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (NASB). These people were deceptive, and denied that Jesus Christ is Who He is: God come in flesh, Christ of God having a body of flesh, and per 1 John 2:22, they were "denieth that Jesus is the Christ" (ASV).⁵ Jesus acknowledged being Christ in Matthew 16:16-20, and acknowledged being God and having a physical body at John 20:27-9. Gnostic groups of the first two centuries disliked the idea of anything divine having a physical body, and denied that Jesus Christ was one Person in flesh.⁶ They were not Christians, as they rejected Jesus' own teachings on Who He is. They would also deny Christ's redemptive death, a "first" truth of the Gospel per 1 Corinthians 15:3 "Christ died for our sins" (ASV). Here, "doctrine" again referred to something that affected properly valuing Christ and His work.

¹ NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB emphasis mine.

² These were not Jewish Christians. 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. There was and is a difference between following the Judaic Law oneself, versus demanding that everyone do so.

³ *Bíblia de Estudo Almeida*, page NT 262.

⁴ KJV| *Westminster Study Bible*, page 403 NT| KJV| McReynolds, *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*, page 874| KJV.

⁵ Noted in *Serendipity Bible: For Personal and Small Group Study*, page 1710.

⁶ *Open Bible*, page 1247.

At *Titus 2:1-8a*, we have

"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" was once again doctrine that affected life outside of worship settings.

Many people think "doctrine" means beliefs about church operations and distinctly `religious' beliefs. In Scripture, "doctrine" surpasses this: in Scripture, it is about how Christians value Christ and live daily life in and out of assembly and conscious worship. Let us have Bible meanings for Bible terms, and accept how Scripture means "doctrine."

"False Doctrine": If a teacher is mistaken, but does not oppose what Scripture calls "doctrine," Scripturally s/he neither teaches "false doctrine" nor is a "false teacher."

As we take Bible meanings for Bible terms, let us recall the Hebrews 10:24-5 purpose of church assembly, which is to encourage each other to love and do good deeds outside of assembly. It is doctrine/s affecting life outside of assembled worship that we should focus on during assembly. Let us note two passages settling this, focusing on *Titus 3:8b-9a*:

Is It Doctrine?:

In mathematics, an expert teaching an algebra class can make statements about geometry that are accurate – but even so, they are not algebra.

The Pharisees were experts on the Old Testament who focused on applications thereof,* many of which were religious-only. Jesus Christ reproved them for "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) regardless of accuracy at Matthew 15:6-9. In religion, a correct idea about an area unrelated to Scripture "doctrine" is not doctrine.

*NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

Titus 3:8b-9a "I desire that you insist on these things, so that those 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" (ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

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).

The "law" = the Judaic worship code that Jewish Christians continued to follow – and the "law" = the first five books of Scripture. **Even if it is over Scripture, turning disagreements irrelevant to good deeds into strifes-disputes which detract from them is sin.** This is sound doctrine.

Christians Have a Different Calling – Romans 12:2

We have just studied how "doctrine" (KJV, ASV) is about proper esteem of Jesus Christ and His work, and about good deeds within godly lives. A good way to show proper esteem of Jesus Christ is to follow His teachings and the ways He prescribed in our overall lives. Christ taught the same at Luke 6:46 "And why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (ASV).

At Matthew 22:36 Jesus was asked "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (ASV); His reply in Matthew 22:37-40 was as so:

"And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" (ASV).

"Jesus answered, `Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.' This is the first and most important command. And the second is like the first: `Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands" (ICB).

Jesus did not set this part aside when He said "Do not suppose that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to | fulfill" (NBV|NASB) at Matthew 5:17. Some parts of the

Judaic Law were to remain relevant after the New Covenant was established; Romans 13:8-10 has

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (NASB).

This is the part of the Law that we were to continue to follow per multiple New Testament passages:

- ★ Jesus' statement at Matthew 5:17 is explained at Galatians 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, [but only] the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). By biblical faith in the Gospel, we fulfill this high-priority portion of the Law.
- ★ Romans 13 is not the only place where Jesus' statement at Matthew 22:37-40 was held to be relevant in the New Covenant period. Behold James 2:8 "If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' [then you are doing right]" (ESV|ICB).

This overall principle is given high priority in the teachings of Jesus Christ, Whom Christians are to follow, and throughout the New Testament; further, it is a universal principle and general command.

The world system fights over ideas. If multiple groups disagree about government, common results are nasty political campaigns or violence. If multiple entities disagree on access to resources, common results are sleazy litigation or violence. If multiple groups differ on who should get what, common results are mass disruption and/or violence. Strife to advance ideas is the way of the world.

It should not be so for Christians. Romans 12:2 has "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (ESV). We are not to act according to the ways of the world when they are contrary to Christ's teachings. Our ways should conform to Christ's teachings.

This is why 2 Timothy 2:24-5a says "And the Lord's servant must not strive, but [be kind to everyone], apt to teach, forbearing []. The Lord's servant must gently teach those who do not agree with him" (ASV|ICB|ASV|ICB). Nasty/obnoxious is not how Christians should teach or evangelize.

James 3:17 has "wisdom from above is pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (ESV). Regardless of one's talents in 'Bible academics,' showing these attributes demonstrates whether or not a person has a wise understanding of Scripture.

We show strong faith by doing the work of the Lord the ways He told us to do it¹ⁿ - even when it seems inexpedient, and it is tempting to 'cut corners.' We should do the work of the Lord adhering to the ways He told us to do it - we simply firmly trust that this is how it should be done.

'But we must not love error': Beliefs are things; people are people. We must always make that distinction.

'But I do not do well under these standards': Either dispute according to the Lord's standards, or refrain.

'But I think truth trumps need for love': At Luke 9:52-5, after two of Jesus' disciples asked to burn a village that rejected Him, "He turned and rebuked them" (NBV); their rightness lacked love,² and He disliked that.

'But Jesus occasionally did vitriolic metaphors, accusations and reprimands': First, Jesus only spoke thus to people deliberately opposed to Him. Second, supernatural mind-reading is not something mortals should expect to do. Jesus Christ knows all things, including exactly what anyone is thinking; we do not. Third, He is Lord; we are not. He explicitly told us how WE are to treat people.

¹ It gets alleged that being courteous in debates with non-Christians is the same as showing doubt, lack of conviction, or approval of falseness. In reality, Jesus Christ taught a way to live, including how to treat people. **Sinning when evangelizing is still sinning.**

We do not show the world that we believe Jesus Christ's teachings are true when we disregard those teachings when evangelizing. In fact, we show the opposite. We show that we do not believe that Jesus Christ's teachings merit following. When we do what He disapproved of when claiming to represent Him, we do not honor Him.

In efforts to evangelize, there is no place for efforts to offend people 'to get their attention.' In missions, no matter how wrong any local customs may be, there is no place for insulting the local populace by wantonly disrespecting those customs.

If we want to show the world we believe that Jesus Christ should be followed, we can best do that by doing so ourselves when we deal with them. We may not get the conversion/s we were trying for, but at least we tried the way Christ told us to.

² Pointed out by S. E. Stone, Simply Christians, page 64.

Mishandling Doctrine and Directed Division in Church Settings

Topic #1 of 2: Nastiness

We have discussed two meanings of doctrine, and which is that of Scripture:

1. Doctrines that really are relevant only during times when church is assembled, and
2. Doctrines that affect how we live every moment of our lives.

We concluded, based on its Scripture meaning and on the purpose of church assembly per Hebrews 10:24-5, that the latter should have preeminence in church assembly. We now turn to a sad situation common in our churches: use of assembly-only doctrines to justify disregard of all-week doctrine. 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). Despite this, 2 John is often used to justify deliberate mistreatment of people¹ⁿ disagreed with over meeting-time religious tenets.

As Christians, we are disciples of Jesus Christ, and that simply means that we are followers of Jesus Christ. What did Jesus teach? Behold, COATTHEU 22:36 where Jesus is asked "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (ASV). The reply in COATTHEU 22:37-40 was this:

"And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets" [ASV]

"Jesus answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.' This is the first and most important command. And the second is like the first: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands" [ICB].

Jesus did not set this part aside when He said "Do not suppose that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to | fulfill" (NBV | NASB) at Matthew 5:17. Some parts of the Law were to be relevant after the New Covenant was established. At Romans 13:8-10 it is stated

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (NASB).

This is the part of the Law that we were to continue to follow per several New Testament passages:

- ★ Jesus' statement at Matthew 5:17 is explained at CALATIANS 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, |but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). By biblical faith in the Gospel, we fulfill this high-priority portion of the Law.
- ★ Behold James 2:8 "If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' |then you are doing right" (ESV|ICB). Hence, Romans 13 is not the only place where Jesus' statement at Matthew 22:37-40 was shown relevant in the New Covenant period.

This overall principle is given a high priority in Jesus' words, whom Christians are to be followers of, and in the New Testament; further, it is a universal principle and a general command. We need to remember this as we transition.

Having placed in mind what we just studied of a high priority and general commandment, we now focus directly on 2 John. Many people seize upon verses 9-11 as translated in the KJV

"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" [KJV]²ⁿ

and then use it to justify indulging themselves in *mean-spirited* treatment of people believing ANY tenets they disagree with.³ⁿ This is tragic misuse of what has been rightly called "The Good Book."

¹ **People and beliefs are two distinct things.** Our treatment of the two should differ accordingly. People's beliefs can be treated as things; people should be treated like people.

² There is a textual variant at KJV "transgresseth" and correction will be discussed.

³ People get very creative in coming up with bogus schemes for this aim.

Meanings of the antiquated English "God speed" include 'good luck' or 'I hope your venture goes well for you.' Whom is this about? Verse 7 has "many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (KJV), and verse 10 again "If there any come to you" meaning traveling teachers who teach deceptively. Hence, in the KJV wording, when we are not to say "God speed" to these people, it means that we are not to say 'good luck' or 'I hope your venture goes well for you.' That is all: we are not to wish success in their venture to teach deceptively -- nothing more. We are NOT directed to treat them spitefully.

However, let us examine whether the passage authorizes us to not wish success in Christian service to people we disagree with in just any matter. We will find out that this also is not the case.

KJV "bid God speed" is "greet" in the NKJV, a slight clarification, but not full. This phrase in the Greek is two verbs: χαίρειν = "to rejoice" and λεγετε = "say."¹ χαίρειν is a form of χαίρω, and forms of χαίρω are used for formal greetings in such places as James 1:1, Acts 23:26, and most notably at Acts 15:23,² where it is used three times in a formal Christian greeting formula.³ Hence, at 2 John verse 10 we are not to give a 'fellow Christian greeting' to the people under discussion.

Now, who are the people under discussion? Before this subject, behold verses 4-6:

"I was very happy to learn about some of your children. I am happy that they are following the way of truth, as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I tell you: We should all love each other. This is not a new command. It is the same command we have had from the beginning. And loving means living the way he commanded us to live. And God's command is this: that you live a life of love. You have heard this command from the beginning" [ICB].

This was about how our overall lives should be lives of love. At verse 7, the topic changes: "Es que han salido por el mundo muchas engañosores" (NVI) = "It is that they have left by the world many deceivers" who are "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (NASB). These people were deceptive, and denied that Jesus Christ is Who He says He is: God come in flesh, Christ of God having a body of flesh, and per 1 John 2:22, they were "denieth that Jesus is the Christ" (ASV).⁴ Jesus acknowledged being Christ in Matthew 16:16-20, and acknowledged being God and having a physical body at John 20:27-9. Gnostic groups of the first two centuries disliked the idea of anything divine having a physical body, and denied that Jesus Christ was one person in flesh.⁵ They were not Christians. They rejected Jesus' own teachings on Who He is; they also denied Christ's redemptive death, a "first" truth of the Gospel per 1 Corinthians 15:3 "Christ died for our sins" (ASV). Gnostics fabricated Him an entirely different teacher, and taught salvation through 'self-knowledge'⁶ instead of faith. *Gnostics were not Christians; they did not even acknowledge the Christians' Christ.*

2 John verse 8 expresses hope that Christians not lose reward due to these people. At verse 9, KJV "transgresseth" follows later Greek manuscripts; the three oldest Greek manuscripts have other Greek ⁷ translated "goes beyond,"⁸ "goes too far" (NASB). This refers to the Gnostic claim that rejecting "the doctrine | of the Christ"⁹ was 'gnosis/knowledge beyond' that of 'common Christians.'

At 2 John verses 10 and 11, which have already been discussed, we were told not to give a formal 'fellow Christian greeting' to these people, who were deceitful Gnostic non-Christian teachers who *travel to deny even the existence of the Christian's Christ*, nor were we to let them enter assembly.¹⁰ⁿ

Now, having examined the passage, we review Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8-10, and James

¹ McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 875.

² In Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 453.

³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 283 NT.

⁴ Noted in Serendipity Bible: For Personal and Small Group Study, page 1710.

⁵ Open Bible, page 1247.

⁶ Funk, Hoover, et al, The Five Gospels, page 500.

⁷ Hodges, Farstad, Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, pages xvii, 717.

⁸ Westminster Study Bible, page 403 NT.

⁹ KJV| McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 874.

¹⁰ The need for this warning shows that New Testament-era congregations tended to accept any teacher self-identified as Christian. This is unlike many congregations today.

2:8 which teach that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, that this is a high priority command, and that it has a general application. Returning to 2 John verses 7-11, we note that we are to not give entrance or 'fellow Christian greeting' to teachers who deny the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and this is specific; one reason may have been to avoid giving credibility to their messages in Christian assembly.

Nowhere in this passage are we told to set aside the high priority general command of Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8-10, and James 2:8 in how we treat these specific people. We are not to give them 'fellow Christian greeting,' and we are to send them away with Scriptural kindness.

Furthermore, nowhere in all of Scripture are we told to be even this inhospitable toward anyone else in our assemblies, or visiting our assemblies, or in contact with people of our assemblies. This is regardless of religious matters. Recall the precept of 1 Corinthians 4:6 quoted in the footer.

Topic #2 of 2: Authorized and Unauthorized Division

Christians have always been urged against division. The strongest command is at Romans 16:17b "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); "divisions" here is διχοστασια "standing apart."¹ These are acts of dissociation. What is interesting is that the passage says that such conduct is "contrary to what you have been taught." Even before this epistle was written, they had already been taught not to engage in acts of dissociation. We can conclude that this is a general principle.

General New Testament-era teaching was that Christians were not to disassociate themselves from each other via acts of division. There are passages of Scripture that provide situations where it is appropriate to divide within the church.

Matthew 18:15-7 is one such passage of Scripture. In this passage, Jesus Christ said

"if thy brother |should do wrong| against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the |tax collector" (ASV|NBV|ASV|NBV).

Here, one believer has done a wrong to another believer.²ⁿ The wronged believer is to first privately approach the believer who did the wrong in an attempt at reconciliation. If that does not work, one or two others are to be involved. Only after this does not work is the whole congregation to be involved.³ Further, this is to happen when the sin is a wrong committed "against" a believer.

At 2 *Thessalonians 3:6b* the KJV has "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition you received from us." "Walk" refers how we live. That this passage refers to overall conduct is plain from the whole passage: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you 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).

To "walketh disorderly" means to live "an unruly life," and refers to overall living.

Similarly, 1 *Corinthians 5:11* specifies we "must not associate with any who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral or greedy, idolaters or slanderers, drunkards or swindlers" (TNIV). These too are matters of overall lifestyle.

2 *Corinthians 6:14-8* says "Be not yoked unequally with unbelievers" and "be separate" (NBV). This is about relations with unbelievers, and licenses no such conduct toward believers.

¹ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

² This is **NOT** just any sin.

³ The goal is reconciliation. If the steps are not done for that end, they are not to be done. No step is to be skipped; each must be done for it to be okay to go on. Further, it should be evident that if the wrongdoer is not present at assembly for the attempts at reconciliation, the matter is not to be brought before the church.

We should not be acting adversely to anyone – Christian or not – beyond what these passages state.¹ⁿ ***The general commands to Christians to not to engage in acts of division against each other are to be followed in all cases except where Scripture explicitly tells us to do otherwise.*** In all these things, it is right to follow the 1 Corinthians 4:6 New Testament church "precept | `Do not go beyond what is written" (TCNT | TNIV).

Lesson from Bad Doctrine at Corinth and from 2 Peter 1:3

Topic #1 of 2: The Lesson of the Corinthians

We studied earlier what makes a church: people who are followers of Jesus Christ. Doctrinal purity might be a criteria for quality of a congregation, but it is not a criteria for its validity.

The Corinthians were not a good congregation in either teaching or action. They had a slogan translated "I have a right to do anything" (TNIV) or "I am allowed to do anything" (NLT 1996) which was mentioned at 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23; Paul had to address this. They were fighting; they had to be told at 1 Corinthians 14:33 "God is not the author of |tumult|, but of peace" (KJV 1611|margin|KJV 1611). The church at Corinth exemplified what NOT to be, as 1 Corinthians addresses sin after sin after sin. Even so, they were greeted as a "church of God" (ASV) at 1 Corinthians 1:2. As Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans from Corinth, he wrote "All the churches of Christ salute you" (ASV) at Romans 16:16, despite that the congregation at Corinth was anything but a model church.

After a scathing letter, Paul wrote at 1 Corinthians 15:58 "So my dear brothers, stand strong. Do not let anything change you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. You know that your work in the Lord is never wasted" (ICB). The epistle had rebuke after rebuke for sin after sin and addressed bad doctrinal teaching, yet acknowledges that they were doing work for the Lord.

Despite their bad actions, and their bad teaching, Paul makes the matter clear for posterity at 1 Corinthians 15:1-2a: "Now brothers, I want you to remember the Good News I brought to you. You received this Good News, and you continue strong in it. And you are saved by this Good News" (ICB). Repeat: "you are saved by this Good News."

Doctrinal impurity does not make one cease to be a Christian, nor make a congregation cease being a congregation of Christians.²ⁿ In an irony of God, the renegade congregation at Corinth had a good lesson for us.

Topic #2 of 2: The Corinthian Lesson Taken Forward in Time and 2 Peter 1:3

We have seen that doctrinal imperfection does not make one cease to be a Christian. If any generation of Christians had an opportunity to have correct doctrine, it was the New Testament church. They were guided by the apostles that the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned personally.

After the apostles all died, the only words of the apostles that could be referred to were the New Testament Scriptures. Things were not the same then as now. Printing did not appear until the mid-1400's. Before that, Scripture had to be copied by hand. Most facilities and human labor for keeping Scripture extant to the mid-1400's were resources of the proto-Orthodox/proto-Catholic church body until 1054, and the Orthodox and Catholic denominations afterward. Hand-copying documents is still drudgery, and it was worse in their conditions. The human component of keeping Scripture extant was a monumental effort and was a major contribution to the rest of the church.

¹ Ephesians 5:11 gets abused similarly; the first part is translated in the KJV "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" and is translated "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (ESV). This is about "works" = doings. This is not about people at all, let alone Christians.

² 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 upon chosen preference.

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

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

The fact that a copy of Scripture took months to years of labor made widespread availability of Scripture impossible. Common Christians then could not spend hours each day poring over private copies of Scripture¹ⁿ to ensure that the finest details of their religious beliefs were absolutely in line with what was in Scripture. Large-scale absolute 'doctrinal correctness' was not possible.

God "hath granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (ASV) per 2 Peter 1:3. Until well over 1000 years after Scripture's completion, God did not provide to the church the means to spend hours each day poring over private copies of Scripture²ⁿ to ensure that the finest details of everyone's beliefs were perfectly aligned to Scripture. This includes the New Testament era. It is evident that He did not intend Christian salvation or unity to be dependent upon ability to do this.

The Jerusalem Council Situation and Romans 12:1

At Acts 15:1-2 some Jewish Christians "began teaching the non-Jewish believers: 'You cannot be saved if you are not circumcised as Moses taught us.'" (NCV). This prompted the Jerusalem Council, and at 15:5 "some of the believers who belonged to the Pharisee group came forward and said 'The non-Jewish believers must be circumcised. They must be told to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV). Per 15:24, this "troubled" (ASV) Gentile Christians.³ⁿ

The "law of Moses" was the Old Covenant worship code. It involved ceremonies, dietary requirements, and other worship-specific actions which had to be kept in mind constantly. Gentiles did not follow this worship code. Hence, Acts 15 reports that Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians engaged in different worship-specific behavior during the New Testament period.⁴ James said at Acts 15:19-20 "'So I think we should not bother the non-Jewish people who are turning to God. Instead, we should write a letter telling them these things: Stay away from food that has been offered to idols (which makes it unclean), any kind of sexual sin, eating animals that have been strangled, and blood'" (NCV). The letter was then started at Acts 15:23 "From the apostles, and elders" (NCV). Jewish-Christians continued to follow the Law of Moses. 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. There continued to be differences in worship style among Christians even after the Jerusalem Council - with approval. It follows from this approved example that Christians can vary in worship-specific behavior.

Jewish Christians continued in the Old Covenant worship code, but no new replacement specific worship code was issued to Gentile Christians. James 1:25 reports "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (ASV). At John 4:19-21, Jesus foretold a time with no ritualized/ceremonial worship code, and said at 4:23 "The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (ICB). During that time, worship is no longer centered on ritualized ceremonies - it is to be from the heart and have a larger meaning. We worship under what Galatians 6:2 calls "law of Christ" (ASV), and in order to follow it here: "Help each other with your troubles" (ICB). Very simply, the "law of Christ" is doing good deeds with our regular lives as Jesus Christ taught.

¹ As noted by numerous Orthodox and Catholic apologists, but for another reason.

² We who love owning Bibles should be warned from what some parents do when their children persist in fighting about a gift. Often, the gift is put away to end it.

³ This is like what many Christians and members of church-related groups do when promoting cherished tenets. The Pharisees valued ceremonial aspects of the Judaic Law; it was natural and okay that some who became Christians continued this. However, they did so to the extreme of insisting others adopt it and troubled other Christians needlessly. It was a valid Law; God called the Jews to keep it for over 1000 years, and it was rightly kept by Jews who adopted Christianity. This passage shows that regardless of the validity of a beloved religious tenet, one can promote it wrongly.

ONE MORAL of the story is this principle: **There are wrong ways to be right.**

⁴ Noted in Lucado, The Inspirational Bible, page 1265.

There is worship that every Christian is obligated to engage in. Paul writes at Romans 12:1 "I beg you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable | worship" (NBV | ESV). Unlike Old Covenant offerings, New Covenant offerings are to be our own selves as living people. This offering is to be our worship. At Romans 6:13 we have "use your whole body as a tool to do what is | good" (NLT 1996|NCV). Our new worship as Christians is doing good things with our whole lives.

James 1:27 agrees in correspondence to Jewish Christians: "Pure religion and undefiled | in the sight of | our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (ASV|NBV|ASV); the underlying Greek of "religion" literally means "religious service,"¹ so this "pure religious service" is to serve people and stay away from sin that pervades the world outside church assemblies. As both James and Paul taught their respective audiences, our New Covenant worship as Christians is doing good things with our overall lives.

Purpose of Congregations – Hebrews 10:24-5 Essay 2 of 2

Jesus said in 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). Note the "I **have taught** you"²ⁿ – He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. In His earthly ministry, Christ had preached mostly on our deeds in regular life.

Hebrews 10:25 is often misused to guilt-trip people into never missing congregation meetings. The passage does not mandate a specific frequency, but does prohibit discontinuing assembly. What is often missed is the purpose to even assemble explained in the previous verse; Hebrews 10:24-5 says

"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 stated before the command to not abandon church assembly and reiterated afterward: to encourage each other to live Christ-preached lives of love and good deeds.³ⁿ

Church assembly is not the bulk of the Christian's obligations.⁴ⁿ Church congregations are not appointed a primary role in Christian living. Congregations do not exist for assembly-time 'doctrines.' Religious tenets do not make churches; the personal identity of the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah⁵ⁿ/Christ and Son of God is *πετρα* "foundation boulder"⁶ of the church per Matthew 16:18, and people who are followers of Jesus Christ make churches per the biblical + secular meaning of *εκκλησια* discussed earlier.⁷ⁿ Jesus spent most of His time on the earth teaching us to live in godly ways all the time whether assembled with other followers of Him or not. At Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus taught about His final judgment, and He will base it upon the faith-motivated good deeds we are to do for others in and out of assembly settings. We are expected to live overall Christian lives, and per Hebrews 10:24-5, we assemble those lives together for meetings to encourage more such efforts.

¹ In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

² Notions that Jesus Christ's discourses were to cease relevance and/or priority after His few-year earthly ministry are contrary to both good reason and this passage. Paul reported "principles of behavior| in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV) at 1 Corinthians 4:17 -- the apostle Paul was teaching those things after Christ's earthly ministry. This was "the apostles' doctrine" (KJV) of Acts 2:42.

³ Any church congregation neglecting this purpose neglects its reason to exist.

⁴ At even 10 hours of congregation meetings in a week, this is less than 6% of the week.

⁵ John 1:41b "We have found the Messiah'" and "which translated means Christ" (NASB).

⁶ MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

⁷ This was at *Part 5/ The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

Per Hebrews 10:24-5, Christians meet in congregations to encourage each other to serve the Lord in these ways through love and doing overall good deeds. *Regardless of the quality of assembly-time religious precepts*, any church congregation that neglects or resists this purpose has abandoned its God-ordained task and has failed to meet its very purpose for existence. Church unity should be based upon aim and purpose: to serve the living Lord Jesus Christ.

* Church unity should be based upon aim and purpose: *
* to serve the living Lord Jesus Christ. *
* * *

"The Same Mind" in Directions to Congregations

- "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) – 1 Corinthians 1:10.
- "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (ASV) – 2 Corinthians 13:11.
- "make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (ASV) – Philippians 2:2.

The community of Jesus Christ's followers became numerous denominations often due to differences in precepts and worship practice during mutually separate meetings, so it is easy to think that "same mind" refers to such matters. These passages were written to New Testament congregations before these disputes, so these passages cannot refer to such matters.¹ⁿ In 1 Peter 3:8, written to a region, Greek translated "of one mind" (KJV) is translated with more clarity as "harmonious" (NASB).

We notice that these were directions to individual congregations meeting together. We recall that Romans 14:1-13 approves difference in thought over religious details, so 'ye all think the same about religious details' is not meant. Disputes happen in congregations and groups of congregations over other things besides religious thought.

To get the Bible meaning of the Bible term, we consider the purpose of church assembly is stated in Hebrews 10:24-5. That purpose: "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" and "encouraging one another" (NASB). Our purpose as Christians, which was an Acts 11:26 renaming of "disciples" (NASB) = "followers" (ICB) of Christ, is to serve Jesus Christ. We need the "same mind" in serving Him and following His teachings together as congregations -- and as a whole community meeting in local congregations.

Quote: "that ye all speak the same thing."
 This is quoted from 1 Corinthians 1:10. We can get another passage and study what we ought to "all speak the same thing" about. 1 Timothy 6:3-4a says:
 "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"*
 which warns against pushing "different doctrine" that strays from "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life."
 The passage says nothing about direct contradiction or opposition; the passage warns against difference. If our teaching focuses on matters unrelated to anything Jesus spoke about or godly living, then it is not approved.
 Church congregations would all "speak the same thing" if we would all simply focus on the spoken words of Jesus Christ and on godly overall lives.
 *NASB| NBV| NASB| NLT 1996| NASB| NKJV.

The Effects of Division and What Jesus Christ Taught about Unity

Topic 1 of 3: What Scripture and Jesus Taught about Division

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). This refers to the Old Testament; the New Testament church considered its lessons important.

¹ Our "same mind" in many such things should be 'We agree to disagree as needed to do the best service we can for Jesus Christ.'

In Genesis 11:4, all people had one language, and they boasted "Come, let us build a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world" (JPS 1985). At 11:5, God came down to take a look at the project, and at 11:6-8 He said

"If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech.' Thus the LORD scattered them all over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city" (JPS 1985).

To prevent completion of this pride-inflating project in Genesis 11, God divided the people doing it, which caused the work to cease.

The church is the community of followers of Jesus Christ. Our task is to serve the Lord. When we divide ourselves, it has similar adverse effects on the work of the Lord. Jesus Christ taught the same at *CDark* 3:24-5 when He said "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (ASV). Jesus Christ indicated that division is a bad thing for the effectiveness of any group of people.

Topic 2 of 3: What Jesus Said about Exclusivism among His Followers

Luke 9:49-50 says "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out demons in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. But Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against you is for you" (ASV). The word translated before the last "for" is also translated "é a favor" (NTLH) = "is to favor" meaning "in favor of" the disciples.

The disciples' objection: he did not follow "with" their group. Even while he was doing good things in Jesus' Name, they wanted to stop him because their focus was on their group.

As a person not in the group of Jesus' disciples, he was not privy to their conversations or the private conversations Jesus had with them. Undoubtedly, there were a number of things he did not know. Still, Jesus wanted the outsider to continue without interference.

To Jesus Christ, groups did not matter, nor who knew what and how much; Jesus Christ accepted this outsider because he was joined with Him and them in His cause. He wanted His disciples to accept that this outsider was joined to them in their cause. Paul told Christians "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (ASV) at 1 Corinthians 11:1; we should do as Jesus Christ did.

Topic 3 of 3: What Jesus Said about His Will for Unity among His Followers

We now come to the pinnacle statement of Jesus Christ on unity. At *John* 17:20-1a, Jesus Christ prayed while enduring His death experience for us "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV).¹ⁿ

This was a wish of Jesus Christ - a dying wish as He was dying for us. Sadly, there are too many followers of His who *prefer* separation. Some acknowledge other Christians as Christians yet seek to stay aloof from them. Some church people diligently seek for reasons in some Christians to shun them as non-Christians²ⁿ entirely.³ⁿ All this is despite the fact that Jesus Christ was explicit about His will in this matter.

Jesus Christ was explicit in expressing His will for unity in His church. Some people have sought to justify divisions by claiming that others are wrong in an area of Scripture inference. Even if

¹ He did NOT say 'may all be in one organization' or 'may all agree on religious details.'

² Perhaps the most creative of these efforts is denial of Christian status because of congregation name. Scripture never mandates on names, and recorded self-designations are numerous. About ownership: Acts 20:28 "church of the Lord" (ASV); 1 Corinthians 1:2 "church of God" (ASV); 1 Timothy 3:15 "church of the living God" (ASV); Romans 16:16 "churches of Christ" (ASV); 1 Corinthians 11:16 "churches of God" (ASV). About composition: 1 Corinthians 14:33 "churches of the saints" (ASV). Demanding specific congregation names violates the 1 Corinthians 4:6 New Testament church precept.

³ Many hate being disagreed with so much that they wish it was punished with Hell. Many loath some people so much that they wish agreeing with the loathed had the same penalty.

some Christians are truly mistaken in areas of Scripture inference, it would not follow that what Jesus Christ expressly said at John 17:20-1a ceases to be His will. Christians' wrongness about areas of Scripture inference is irrelevant to what Jesus Christ explicitly said He wants at John 17:20-1a. There are some things that do not need to be 'inferred' because Scripture is explicit: what Jesus Christ said at John 17:20-1a is explicit: Jesus Christ wants His followers united as "one" in serving Him. What is explicit is more clearly to be followed than any matter dependent upon 'inference.'

Despite what Jesus Christ prayed awaiting death, there are many who accept any functional unity at all only on condition that everyone else agree with them on either

1. everything, refusing to bear with 'doctrinal faults' of other Christians, contrary to Ephesians 4:2, or
2. if 'we do not have a corner on the truth' is conceded, the assembly-time 'doctrines'/practices deemed to be 'most important'¹ⁿ – such judgments are themselves improvable opinions.²ⁿ

This is sad: **the dying will of the Lord Jesus Christ is suspended in favor of preferred/cherished opinions and conceit-filled egos by people who are supposed to be His followers.** We should all prefer His will.

Many refuse to honor this prayer if it would 'excuse' others from agreeing with their beloved religious tenets. Many people seem to love their religious tenets more than they love Jesus Christ.

Many people would honor Jesus' prayer only if others come to agree with them. No mortals should think unity in Jesus Christ's church depends on agreement with them. It is the LORD's church. The LORD Jesus Christ said at John 17:20-1a "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). It is a simple statement.

"Divisions": Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 1, Galatians 5:19-21

➤ "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them" (ASV).

➤ "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them" (ESV).

➤ "But I warn you, brothers, to keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, quite out of harmony with what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV).

Disagreement is not division.³ⁿ Two cooperating nations remain divided nations. At a sporting event, two fans can disagree on preferred victor, but attend together united in intent of enjoying each other and the game. The Greek words for these actions differ as well.

Further, three different Greek words with different connotations get translated "division." One word translated "division" is διαμερισμος.⁴ It appears only at Luke 12:51 and the sense there is "strife"⁵ contrasted to "peace"⁶ referring to hostility against Christians by the world.

Another one of the words is σχισμα.⁷ This is not in Romans 16:17, but this word was used in 1 Corinthians when the congregation had divided into factions.⁸ Behold 1 Corinthians 1:9-11

¹ The church existed without distinct denomination/'fellowship' 'rediscoveries' whether real or mistaken. While often valuable when real, these cannot be most important.

History is full of church groups that crusaded over legitimate 'rediscoveries' and got stunted growth and development -- DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 7.

² For instance, let us use Baptists and Churches of Christ. In the New Testament, salvation by biblical faith/belief is discussed more than baptism is mentioned, and baptism was prompt. Baptists address biblical faith most when preaching salvation, but typically do not baptize promptly. Church of Christ people typically preach salvation messages with most time spent on baptism, but do prompt baptism. As shown by the examples of Scripture, both do something right and something wrong; which error is lesser? The answer to this cannot be empirically proven -- any proposed answer to this is an unprovable opinion.

³ The text does **NOT** have 'who hold views you dislike and cause you to start divisions.'

⁴ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁵ in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁶ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

⁷ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁸ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

"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. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are quarrels among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" [ASV|BishB, GenB|NASB|ASV].

Here, the Corinthians are reprimanded for dividing into factions claiming allegiance to a person at detriment of the others and quarreling about this. Some boasted allegiance to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas = Peter, and some to Christ in self-exaltation over other Christians.¹ ALL FOUR parties are here rebuked. The word σχισμα refers to a tear,² as in a garment; a torn garment may still be one piece. They "are saved" (ICB) per 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 despite this and are acknowledged to be serving the Lord in 1 Corinthians 15:58, and in the epistle they are all told to end this behavior.

Another Corinthian Lesson: Despite their dividing into factions, they were called "the church of God which is at Corinth" (ASV) at 1 Corinthians 1:2. Some mortals believe that separating themselves off as an excluding group can determine the boundaries of the Lord's one church and put everyone they reject outside it. 1 Corinthians 1 shows that such mortal decisions and actions do not have that power.

The third Greek word translated "division" is διχοστασια.³ Literally, it is a "standing apart"⁴ and is at Romans 16:17. Here, the people are dissociating from others by deliberate intent and act.

These acts are **NOT** disagreement. The Greek words διακρισις and διαλογισμος referring to **thought open to question** at Romans 14:1⁵ are not in Romans 16:17. Here are specifics of διακρισεις διαλογισμων at 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 censure 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|NASB|NBV].

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians disagreed over several religious details. It did not tell them what to think or tell them to come to a common opinion. It says about these differences in thought and practice "Who are you to censure the servant of another" and "let us no longer censure one another." Romans 14:1-13a told them to accept these differences in thought with no "censure."

Therefore, when Romans 16:17 says "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), it was not condemning people having difference in thought. The Greek word translated "divisions" is διχοστασια "standing apart"⁶ and describes *the act of dissociation/division itself*.

¹ These were all very legitimate characters, just as many modern Christian religious tenets are legitimate -- but many modern Christians 'rally around' favorite religious tenets just as the Corinthians did favorite characters, causing a similar situation.

² Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁴ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

⁵ Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, page 139.

⁶ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

Galatians 5:19-21 lists some "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts "sexual immorality" (ESV), includes διχοστασια,¹ and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Greek διακρισεις διαλογισμων referring to **thought open to question** at Romans 14:12 is NOT in this list – διχοστασια "standing apart"³ IS in this list.⁴ⁿ At Romans 16:17, those who cause and engage in this conduct are acting "contrary to the doctrine that" they "have been taught" (ESV). Recall that "doctrine" in Scripture commonly refers to overall conduct.⁵ⁿ This divisive conduct is condemned with persons causing such conduct and with other instigators of "temptations" (NBV).

Romans 16:17b "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations | contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught | and turn away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV) condemns those in the church who are διχοστασια "standing apart"⁶ = deliberately dissociating. Promoters of such conduct are also condemned. Further, εκκλινατε here means not only to "turn aside" from such persons but also tells anyone who has fallen among such persons to "remove from" such practice.⁷

It follows that Christians sin if they dissociate from other Christians. Those who promote this conduct are just like "those who cause divisions and temptations" (NBV), with "temptations" referring to sin of action, commonly used about the types of sins non-believers engage in. It also follows that to instruct, encourage, or mandate such divisive action is a sin of grave seriousness.

This carnal sin has been widely-accepted within the church for centuries. In fact, it has even been promoted as a good thing to do. However, as we behold Scripture, we see that it is not a good thing to do, but is actually a sin strongly denounced in Scripture.

We must remember the importance of Scripture; 2 Timothy 3:16-7 describes Scripture as so:

"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."⁸

Scripture is God's written Word and has good uses,⁹ⁿ with this specific purpose: to make us "entirely instructed for all good work." God gave it to guide what we **DO**. "All Scripture is breathed out by God" – it is from God Himself and is the highest Word on any subject it addresses. Therefore, *when Scripture condemns acts of dissociation in the church as sin, it is not a matter of personal discretion.*

As of c. 2000, this carnal sin is often preached from pulpits. In many groups, "withdrawing fellowship" is a reaction to disagreements over assembly-time precepts; they blame others' `failure' to agree with them for their own actions they choose for themselves without interference from the others in their affairs. Some divisive groups tell people to avoid presence at a congregation that does not have `correct' assembly-time `doctrine.' Some hold a "doctrine of separation" where they refuse dealings with `errant' churches. Such things are cases of διχοστασια "standing apart"¹⁰ condemned at Romans 16:17, and teaching and/or mandating such things is "causing the divisions" (ASV) of Romans 16:17; *the act of dissociation itself is the core sin.*

It should be a matter of deep concern among the followers of Jesus Christ that this carnal sin is often preached and encouraged from pulpits.

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

² Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, page 139.

³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

⁴ It had long been my observation that biblically-deficient ethics/virtue/morality seem more `at home' among highly-factional groups. This passage hints at why.

⁵ For details, see *Part 5/Doctrine and Its Importance*.

⁶ in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁷ Vincent, Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, page 3:181.

⁸ ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruido para toda buena obra" translated.

⁹ *Part 5/Doctrine and Its Importance* explains how "doctrine" in Scripture is about what we do in overall living and about Jesus Christ Himself.

¹⁰ in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

Titus 3:8-11

Discussion #1 of 2: Issues of Carnality

At this passage, Paul discusses the fleshly works of divisiveness described above at Romans 16:17 and Galatians 5:19-21 as so:

"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 works.] 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" [ASV|ESV|ASV].

The "law" is the first five books of Scripture, the Old Testament Judaic Law, which was mainly about ceremonial worship. Paul was stating that Christians should carefully adhere to focusing on good works. He warned that Christians were not to be distracted from these, and told Titus to take out of the way any person intent on creating such distractions. The person is focused on such "unprofitable" distractions, and seeks factions rallied around some aspect of the "unprofitable" distractions; for this, s/he was described as "perverted" and "self-condemned."

We should be wary of indulging in "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) in the list at Galatians 5:19-21, which has διχοστασια "standing apart,"¹ and of violating Romans 16:17 in presuming to cause διχοστασια "standing apart" in the church. At Titus 3:8-11, the situation was one where a "factious man"²ⁿ focused too much on disputes unrelated to "good works"; notice that this included such disputes over portions of Scripture. We should be wary of indulging ourselves in the carnal divisive διχοστασια "standing apart" behavior condemned at Romans 16:17 and Galatians 5:19-21 *even for concerns about proper understanding of Scripture.*

Topic #2 of 2: Greco-Roman Culture

In ancient Greco-Roman culture, philosophical schools were popular. However, they fostered long and bitter disputes.³ In its original meaning, the Greek word transliterated "heresy" meant difference of opinion among philosophers.⁴ In the New Testament era, the word had another meaning. 'Heresies' transliterates Greek αιρεσις plural for "party"⁵/clique and "choosing."⁶ Greek for someone involved in such is αιρετικον translated "factious man" (ASV) at Titus 3:10.

Given the nature of philosophical schools in Greco-Roman culture, this is a natural expansion in meaning. Due to the bitterness of disputes between them, they became factions. When the Bible tells Christians to stay away from αιρεσις and to not be a αιρετικον it recalls the behavior of these philosophical schools. Philosophers liked to spend time focusing on whatever subjects came to their mind regardless of their usefulness in regular life, and then get in bitter disputes.

Paul wrote of people behaving like the stereotypical Greco-Roman philosophers 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:

¹ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; In Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

² The KJV has "heretick" here. The Greek word has no reference to religious error and means "party" in a factional sense -- A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

³ Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, page 123-4.

⁴ Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, page 124.

⁵ A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

⁶ Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

"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).

Here at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."¹ Here, people wanted to "teach strange doctrines" which did "not adhere to" the subjects of the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "godly life." Instead, according to 1 Timothy 1:3-7a and 6:3-4a, they wanted to "teach strange doctrines" related to "mere speculation" and "fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers." 2 Timothy 2:23 warns "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (NASB). Titus 3:8-11 has

"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 works**. 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" (ASV|ESV|ASV).

The "law" is the first five books of Scripture. The "foolish and ignorant speculations" and "foolish questionings" were leading to "quarrels" and "strifes" and the "factious man"; the carnal behavior so common among the Greco-Roman philosophical schools was not to happen in the church.

The Nutshell

At Titus 3:8-11, Christians are told to carefully adhere to focusing on good works and avoid unrelated speculation. Titus 3:8-11 warns that unrelated speculation has potential to lead us to carnal divisive διχοστασια "standing apart" conduct condemned at Romans 16:17 and Galatians 5:19-21; here at Titus 3:8-11, such conduct had become faction-seeking. Furthermore, the "law" = first five books of Scripture; such conduct is sinful *even for concerns about right understanding of Scripture*.

What is Divisive: The Bible knows nothing of divisive ideas. It knows of divisive conduct and people.

Obligation Because of Our Faith: Ephesians 4:2-3

We start with Galatians 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, **but only** the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). For salvation, our faith must be one that "works through love."

We now turn to Ephesians 4:2-3. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,² which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This epistle was originally a circular epistle intended for all Christians, and would have covered all church congregations of Christians. Ephesians 4:2-3 says "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love |; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996|ASV).

Every Christian has the Holy Spirit; upon salvation of Christians, God is "giving them the Holy Spirit" (ASV) per Acts 15:8, and "cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV) per 15:9. In Ephesians 4:2-3, this Holy Spirit that comes to us to cleanse us on the basis of Christian faith is expected to motivate unity among Christians, who should be "giving diligence" to maintain their unity against fleshly divisive διχοστασια "standing apart"³ inclinations mentioned at Galatians 5:19-20.

We must not miss the significance of Galatians 5:6 and Ephesians 4:2-3 together. Our faith must be of "the kind" that "works through love." We must be "making allowances for each other's faults because of" our "love." When we see other Christian groups in real or wrongly-thought error in what happens during their congregation meetings and worship sessions, we still need to be "making allowances for each other's faults" "in the bond of peace" "because of" our "love" from "the kind of faith that works through love." This is **NOT** described as contingent on agreement.

¹ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

² Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; In Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

Local Situations: Colossae/Laodicea, Romans 14-16

We just studied Ephesians 4:2-3. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,¹ which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This epistle was originally a circular epistle intended for all Christians, and would have covered all church congregations of Christians.

Ephesians 4:2-3 says "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love |; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996|ASV). Christians should be "giving diligence" to maintain their unity. It takes work, and we are to make that effort.

The Smaller Affair: Instructions to Colossae and Laodicea

Galatians 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, |but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). For salvation, our faith must be one that "works through love."

Colossians was ultimately to the congregations at both Colossae and Laodicea; at Colossians 4:16 it instructs "when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans" (ASV). In Colossians 3:9-14 we see:

"seeing that ye have put off [the old self with its practices] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator; where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is [the perfect bond of unity]" (ASV|ESV|ASV|NASB).

Greek translated "forbearing one another" is also translated "put up with one another" (PEB).

The passage indicates that ethnic and class barriers that were common in the New Testament era were not to be relevant in Christ. As Jews who became Christians continued to worship personally as Jews per Acts 21:20-5, this passage includes a religious barrier: Jew and non-Jew. This passage principles the relative equality of Christians before Christ, and how there can be no legitimate class system among Christians. Christians are not authorized to claim a class system among us.

Christians are also told to be "put up with one another," and we are told "if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye." The "put up with each other" included where other Christians are wrong. The "if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye" includes complaints about how other Christians serve the Lord.

What is described as "the perfect bond of unity" is simply "love." Such love should come from our faith, as Galatians 5:6 says that good faith is "the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). Faithful followers

of Jesus Christ ought to have the type of love for other Christians and for Christ that enable them to stay united despite normal social boundaries or disapprovals of other Christians.

'But I have a complaint about how they serve the Lord': In this complaint, the person is not complaining about a real or perceived wrong against the person. The person has a complaint about a real or perceived wrong done to the Lord. This is a noble concern, but not our business.
The passage says "if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye." If the Lord did not forgive us, we would stand before Him condemned. He told us that if we "have a complaint against any" we are to forgive it exactly as He has forgiven all Christians.
If our "complaint against any" is about 'how they serve the Lord,' then it is the Lord's business and not ours. We are told to "put up with each other" and that includes this regard. If we refuse to do so, then 'they' may or may not serve the Lord improperly – but we definitely do.

¹ Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

Here is what this passage told them to DO to maintain unity. Christians are to accept that we are not authorized to set up a class system among us. Christians cannot presume a 'this group has a superior status before Christ' and this includes on the basis of rightness/wrongness. Christians are directed to "put up with one another," which would include when Christians are wrong and we do not like it. If we have a "complaint" about other Christians, we are to "as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye." If Christians, motivated by "love," would do these things, doing so would facilitate efforts to retain unity.

The Larger Affair: A Problem at Rome

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is replete with signs that divisions were being caused by people who were unwilling to accept disagreement.

We start at Romans 14:1-13a. 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 [censure] 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|NASB|NBV).

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians disagreed with each other over several religious details. Paul did not tell them of common opinions to have other these or tell them to come to a common opinion. He told them to accept the existence of these differences in thought over religious details.

However, there is more to this text. It says within it "Who are you to censure the servant of another" and "let us no longer censure one another." In regards to the religious disagreements, there was more than just disagreeing or expressing disagreement: there was censuring.

Romans 15:5-7 says:

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (ESV|NASB).

This passage urges that despite the disagreements of Romans 14:1-13, those Christians live in "harmony with one another" and to "accept one another." They were directed to do the latter at Romans 15:7, as it says "accept one another."

Romans 16:17b gives more information: "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). Greek translated "divisions" is διχοστασια "standing apart."¹ These are acts of dissociation. People were causing these acts of dissociation.

So, we summarize what was happening. There were disagreements over religious details, censuring, an occasion to direct the congregation to accept each other, and acts of disassociation. As responses to these disagreements over religious details, there were people censuring others, refusing to accept others, and indulging in divisions from others.

¹ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

It seems apparent that this congregation was undergoing a phenomenon similar to what would affect the church on a large scale centuries later. That phenomenon was an unwillingness to accept disagreement over religious details, with that unwillingness being expressed by censoring, non-acceptance, and acts of disassociation. Scripture answers that scenario.

As Romans 14:1-13a lists the religious disagreements, it says "Who art thou | to censure another's servant?" (ASV | NBV) at Romans 14:4. After accepting each side of the disagreement, and reminding everyone that we answer to the Lord, it says "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV) at Romans 14:13. Romans 15:7 directed them "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (NASB). Romans 16:17b directed "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).

Putting These Together

Galatians 5:6 says "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, | but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). For salvation, our faith must be one that "works through love."

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" (ESV), has *διχοστασια*, and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV). The word *διχοστασια* is literally "standing apart."¹ We are warned that tendencies toward acts of disassociating are as much a part of our carnality as these other carnal lusts.

We come back to Ephesians 4:2-3. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,² which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This epistle was originally a circular epistle intended for all Christians, and would have covered all church congregations of Christians. Ephesians 4:2-3 says "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love |; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996|ASV).

The directive "giving diligence to keep the unity" means that it takes work, as Galatians 5:19-21 shows that our flesh wants to do the opposite. The means by which to avoid giving in to this is from the nature of biblical faith. Galatians 5:6 says that our faith needs to be "the kind of faith that works through love" (ICB). Colossians 3:14 told us to "put on love, which is | the perfect bond of unity" (ASV | NASB). Our faith ought to provide the love to be "perfect bond of unity."

Colossians 3:9-14 lists a series of differences that were commonly barriers and class systems in first century Mediterranean culture. The passage indicates that these did not matter in Christ, showing the relative equality of Christians before Christ. It principles how we are not authorized to presume a class system among us. We cannot claim 'Our group of Christians has a better standing before Christ than those other Christians do.' We cannot do so on any basis.

Colossians 3:9-14 told us "put up with one another," and we are told "if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye." The "put up with each other" included where other Christians are wrong. The "if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye" includes complaints about how other Christians serve the Lord.

As Romans 14:1-13a lists religious disagreements, it says "Who art thou | to censure another's servant?" (ASV | NBV) at Romans 14:4. After accepting each side of the disagreement, and reminding everyone that we answer to the Lord, it says "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV) at Romans 14:13. Romans 15:7 directed them "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (NASB). Romans 16:17b directed "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).

Divisions are not to be used to express disagreement. We are to fight carnal urges toward acts of dividing, and instead strive to stay united without regard to agreement over religious details.

¹ Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1126.
² Hodges, Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, page 582.

Putting It All Together

James said of Gentiles and the Old Testament Judaic Law in Acts 15:19-20 "I think we should not bother the non-Jewish people who are turning to God. Instead, we should write a letter telling" (NCV). 15:23 starts the letter, but Jewish-Christians continued to follow the 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 at 21:24 "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV). There was approved difference in worship style among Christians.

Jewish Christians continued in the Old Covenant worship Law, but no new similar worship code was issued to Gentile Christians. James 1:25 reports "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (ASV). At John 4:19-21, Jesus foretold a time with no ritualized/ceremonial worship code, and said at 4:23 "The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (ICB). Worship no longer centers on ritual/ceremonies – it is to be from the heart and have larger meaning.

There is worship that every Christian is obligated to engage in. Paul writes at Romans 12:1 "I beg you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable | worship" (NBV | ESV). Unlike Old Covenant offerings, New Covenant offerings are to be our own selves as living people. This offering is to be our worship. At Romans 6:13 we have "use your whole body as a tool to do what is | good" (NLT 1996|NCV). Our new worship as Christians is doing good things with our whole lives.

James 1:27 agrees to Jewish Christians: "Pure religion and undefiled | in the sight of | our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (ASV|NBV|ASV); the Greek translated "religion" literally means "religious service,"¹ so "pure religious service" is to serve people and avoid sin that pervades the world outside assembly.

As both James and Paul taught, New Covenant worship as Christians is doing good things with our whole lives. Hebrews 10:16 shows that Jeremiah 31:33 "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (NKJV) pointed to Christians. James 2:8 mentions "the royal law according to Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (ESV). We worship under what Galatians 6:2 calls "law of Christ" (ASV), and to follow it here: "Help each other with your troubles" (ICB). The "law of Christ" is simply doing good deeds with our regular lives as Jesus Christ taught – and per Jeremiah 31:33/Hebrews 10:16, this law is ingrained into each Christian's mind and heart.

Now, turning to the command to assemble as church congregations, we see Hebrews 10:24-5:

"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 lives of love and doing good deeds; *a congregation's quality is how well it meets this divinely-appointed purpose.*

We are commanded to assemble, but it is not always required. Approved example shows this. At Acts 8:26-39, an Ethiopian official who "was returning" (ASV) converted, and then after immediate baptism, the Holy Spirit took the evangelist away, and the Ethiopian official "went joyfully on his way" (NBV) back to Ethiopia -- away from all extant congregations, and all chance to assemble.

Church congregation meetings are not temple worship services.²ⁿ Ancient religions usually centered around worship-specific activities; Old Covenant Judaism was similar, but preference was for such values as Hosea 6:6a "I desire loving-kindness, and not sacrifice" (NBV) which Jesus quoted at both Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. That is one distinction of Judaism from other ancient religions. Still, the center of Jewish religious life was the Jerusalem Temple. Unlike in other ancient religions and Judaism, in Christianity the center of our worship is not temple ceremonies; it is our whole lives.

¹ In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

² Evident by how church meetings were in common homes: Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15.

Hebrews 10:24-5 shows that the purpose of church assemblies is to "encourage" more of the centerpiece of our worship: "love and good deeds" (NASB). Acts 8:26-39 shows that one can be a Christian without assembling in a congregation. The name "Christian" is a renaming of "disciples" (NASB) = "followers" (ICB) from "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB) = "In Antioch the followers were called Christians for the first time" (ICB). Christianity is an individual following of Jesus Christ, and is an at-all-times discipleship following Him in the ways He taught.

We saw that "doctrine" in Scripture affects overall life in and out of church assembly. Titus 3:8 and 1 Timothy 6:3-4 showed that the priority of doctrine in Scripture is godly living + good deeds.

διχοστασια "standing apart"¹ appears at Galatians 5:20² in a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) started at Galatians 5:19. James 1:27 has "Pure religion and undefiled | in the sight of | our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (ASV|NBV|ASV); the Greek translated "religion" literally means "religious service,"³ so "pure religious service" is to serve people and avoid sin that pervades the world outside assembly -- such as all those sins of Galatians 5:19-21, including διχοστασια "standing apart." James 1:27 "pure religious service" would include trying to remain "unspotted" from this sin. Per Hebrews 10:24-5, this is a GOD-ordained priority for congregations.

Now, let us review this essay thus far. First, worship-specific activity was allowed to vary in Scripture. Second, our worship of God is following Jesus Christ in our regular lives. "Doctrine" in Scripture refers to our overall conduct in regular life. The laws of worship that God intended for Christians are ingrained in our hearts and minds. Third, we are directed to assemble habitually to encourage each other in our at-all-times worship, but a person can be a Christian without assembling.

Let us imagine two chocolate cakes. Both are chocolate cakes. However, imagine that one has vanilla icing with chocolate chips, and the other has vanilla icing with chocolate sprinkles. They look different, but they are still chocolate cakes underneath the icing. Remove the icing, and they are missing something but still chocolate cakes; replace the icing, and they are still chocolate cakes.

Now, Let us imagine two Christians. Both are Christians. However, imagine that one assembles at one type of congregation, and the other assembles at another type of congregation. At church meetings, Christians are most visible and look different, but when Christians are serving the Lord away from assembly like most of the time, they are still followers of Jesus Christ = Christians. Without assembly, they are missing something but still Christians; returning to assembly, they are still Christians.

Nothing in all Creation can unmake a Christian. Romans 8:38b-9 assures Christians "neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (ESV). "Anything else in all creation" includes buildings made of created materials, and includes other people; meetinghouses, people using them, and church congregations do not have the power to unmake a Christian. As Acts 8:26-39 shows, a Christian is a Christian whether s/he assembles or not.

Hebrews 10:24-5 shows that church congregations have a supporting role in Christian life: encouraging Christians to keep at our main task of doing good deeds for Christ -- this is each congregation's divinely-appointed reason to exist.⁴ⁿ Christians differ from each other, and Christians attend differing congregations. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" is NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,⁵ found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The letter was initially a general letter to "the saints" in all church congregations. "Ephesians" 3:21-4:5 says:

¹ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

² Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

³ In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

⁴ Any congregation slighting this purpose fails at its task regardless of its tenets.

⁵ Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

"to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever, Amen. So I exhort you, prisoner as I am in the Lord, to conduct yourselves worthy of the calling you have received. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (NBV|NLT 1996|ASV).

In ancient times, baptism was considered an initiation rite¹ⁿ that identified already-done conversion²ⁿ; in Christianity, unlike among other ancient religions, all Christians had/have only one prescribed initiation rite, which is baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. This passage "Ephesians" 3:21-4:5 shows we are to glorify Christ by putting aside differences because we are all "one body" who ultimately identify of "one faith" to serve "one Lord" Jesus Christ. ■

¹ This passage is frequently used to deny existence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The suggestion is based on the assumption that substance is what is meant here, rather than understanding water baptism as an ancient initiation rite.²ⁿ The event of Acts 10:34-48,+11:4-17,+15:8-9 demonstrates New Testament converts receiving both.

Per Mark 1:7-8, John the Baptist "preached" about Jesus Christ "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you |in the Holy Spirit'" (ESV|ASV). John baptized only with water, but Christ was going to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ would actually be involved with baptizing in both. John 3:22-3 has "Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized" (NASB). John 4:1 says "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (NASB) and clarifies "although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were" (NASB).

This is similar to the post-Crucifixion New Covenant. Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus portrayed as baptizing Christians in water; mortals are attributed the responsibility of baptizing in water throughout the New Testament. In the present New Covenant system, Christians baptize in water, while Jesus Himself does not. Jesus does, however, baptize in the Holy Spirit, as anticipated at Mark 1:7-8.

1 Corinthians 12:13 says "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" plus "were all made to drink of one Spirit" (ASV). All Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ does that, as anticipated at Mark 1:7-8.

An effect of when Jesus Christ baptizes us in the Holy Spirit is described in two passages. At Acts 15:8-9 Peter said regarding the first Gentile conversions "And God, who knoweth the heart, |gave them evidence|, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV|NBV|ASV). Titus 3:5 by Paul has "él nos salvó, no por nuestras propias obras de justicia sino por su misericordia. Nos salvó mediante el lavamiento de la regeneración y de la renovación |of the Holy Spirit" (NVI|ASV) = "He us He-saved, not by our own works of righteousness but by His mercy. Us He-saved through the washing of the regeneration and of the renovation/renewal of the Holy Spirit." When Jesus Christ baptizes in the Holy Spirit, it cleanses with "washing of the regeneration and of the renovation/renewal."

Afterward, baptizing in water as an initiation rite²ⁿ to accompany conversion is left to mortals. Ephesians 3:3-9 refers to "mystery" (ASV) in Christianity. Mystery religions were about an entity who overcame death,* as Christ did. The popular competing ancient mystery religion Mithraism had seven levels of initiation.** They reflected rank and involved a water ceremony.^* Christians have no such system; all Christians share one assigned water initiation rite²ⁿ and the same status.

The passage, written to promote Christian mutual acceptance, also gets misused in factious activity. Factious people misuse this passage to reject Christians based on conversion experiences -- a misuse contrary to its purpose and what its principles.

* Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, page 142.

** Sarah Iles Johnston in Johnston, Religions of the Ancient World, page 104.

^* E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, page 276-7.

² For more on this, please see:

Part 4/*The Nature of the New Covenant*

Part 4/*New Testament Example of Faith -- Baptism in Water.*