

Part 6: Lessons of Scripture and the Later Church

A Lesson from History

Topic #1 of 3: The Larger Major Portion of the Restoration Movement

The decades c. 2000 are not the first thought of functional Christian unity. Isolated efforts for unity despite disagreement occurred in Europe in the 1600's,¹ such as the Collegiants of the 1600's and 1700's.²ⁿ The early 1800's eastern American frontier grew the Restoration³ⁿ that led to the Christian Connexion and the Disciples of Christ + Churches of Christ + Independent Christian churches.⁴ⁿ

¹ Tucker, McAllister, Journey in Faith, pages 92-3.

² The Collegiants were loosely-organized groups interested in independent study of Scripture.* They believed in adult baptism by immersion,* freedom for anyone to speak, mutual toleration, and welcomed all Christians regardless of denomination.* They had members of Reformed congregations, Mennonite congregations, other formal congregations, or no formal congregation.** They also helped other church groups.*

* Willoughby, The Beliefs of Early Brethren, page 48.

** Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines, page 10.

³ This gets called the "Stone-Campbell Movement" after Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell. I do not call it that; these two were neither the only nor earliest leaders.

⁴ Many people are not aware this was a unity movement. I see three big reasons for this. One: large parts of the Restoration heritage forsook real efforts for unity. Second: large parts wrongly go on as if the Disciples of Christ is not a Restoration group. Third: one unity-oriented group, the Christian Connection, merged with another denomination, so that part is not well known; see *Topic #2*.

The Disciples of Christ did a Restructure in 1968 resulting in a denomination with three Manifestations: local congregation, Regional Manifestation, and General Manifestation, with each part independent of the others. The General Manifestation has become mostly a secular left-wing political organization with religious aspects. Some Regional operatives have joined them in this. Although no formal split has occurred, those portions have split from the denomination overall in their priorities and activities. The Disciples of Christ overall have kept their Christian priorities and a unity priority, but have been harmed grievously by neglected responsibilities and inappropriate activities of the General Manifestation and its cohorts.

The Independent Christian churches and Churches of Christ have mostly cleaved to certain precepts, and made unity dependent on 'everyone else' agreeing with them. There are exceptions, but as of c. 2000 this is still the case overall. Claiming to be 'just Christians,' they often require Christians to also adopt their precepts to be 'acceptable.' Sermons and Bible studies often spend inordinate amounts of time giving praise to these precepts. They tend to think that as groups, they have not erred in Scripture inference: 'Our precepts are what Scripture teaches.' Claiming belief in congregational autonomy, many strive to pressure any 'wayward' entity to 'be faithful' and 'toe' their party lines. They often view anyone not adopting their precepts to be 'less than fully' loyal to Christ and to Scripture. They often view efforts for Christian unity as telling 'everyone else' what to believe and do so 'we can accept unity with them,' and/or competing against outside church groups to get their members.

Many claim to be 'non-sectarian/non-denominational' -- often preferring "undenominational" to be distinguished from non-denominational churches -- but redefine 'sect' and 'denomination' as 'church group I/we think is wrong.' Many refuse dealings with any so-called 'denomination.' Many talk favorably of unity but avoid participation, and oppose any Christian among their own who is not as factious as they.

Toward the extremes, some in the Restoration think that the only way to be a 'sure' Christian is to be a 'faithful' part of one of their congregations. It gets worse: some think that the only way to be a Christian at all is to be a 'faithful' part of their group. Because concepts of 'faithfulness' center on attendance and on agreement with religious tenets, concern for following Christ's prescribed ethics is too often stunted. This problem has reached far into the Restoration and harmed it.

Many of my comments and criticisms come from experience having invested time, service, and love in all Restoration groups. Read on for good about the Restoration.

The Restoration Movement did not occur in a vacuum.¹ⁿ Some early Restorers tried to remain among Baptists, but were ultimately rejected.² Part of the Restoration Movement was forerun by the Haldane movement ³ⁿ on both sides of the Atlantic to promote "primitive Christianity" to all

¹ The Restoration was not the first restorationist effort. There were others before and concurrent to the Restoration, and this note has but a small sample of them. The biggest reason why these groups attempted the same thing but had different results was the scant attention and detail God's written Word gave to church assembly.

The Restoration Movement had mottos like "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible" to restore New Testament-era congregation practice. Such efforts to do this using only Scripture were not unique to the Restoration Movement.

When the author of this study became a Christian, the Baptist congregation he attended had that aim. Assertions of 'Scripture as our sole authority' are as old as the Baptists; restoring New Testament-era Christianity was still a leading interest among Baptists in the 1800's.* However, they and the Restorers did not agree on how.

Before the Restoration, John Glas and Robert Sandeman began a movement in Europe to operate churches by a New Testament pattern** in the 1700's. Congregations of that movement in both Europe and North America commonly went by the name "Church of Christ."** They required congregation meetings in this order: teaching, giving, Lord's Supper, and prayers -- thinking Acts 2:42 requires this order.** They also did foot washing and the "holy kiss" greeting.** Restoration leader A. Campbell refused the Sandemanian system because it had no unity impetus.^†

As stated above, some Baptists maintain restorationism, inherited from the Anabaptists who became widely-visible in the 1500's. Some 1800's Baptists opposed sermons prepared in advance.^† Other Anabaptist offshoots: Brethren groups. Among Brethren, a conviction "No creed but the New Testament" is common.† The Brethren began in the 1700's with a commitment to replicating life and ordinances of the New Testament-era church.† Mid-1800's Brethren practiced anointing the ill, the "holy kiss" greeting, and foot washing.† Some Brethren do communion celebrations with these three rites at one event: foot washing, love feast, Lord's Supper.† Baptists and Restoration groups normally do not wash feet. Brethren and Baptists see hosting Lord's Suppers infrequently as fine; all three Restoration groups believe in hosting Lord's Suppers weekly. 1800's Brethren had disputes when some built raised platforms for speakers^{††} and a hymnbook with melodies appeared.^{†††} In the 1800's there was dispute of Brethren versus Restorers about whether or not the Lord's Supper was restricted to nights, and in baptism whether to dip thrice or once and forward-only or not.*†

Among the restoration-seeking groups, there has never been agreement as to what Scripture teaches regarding what to do as congregations. The reason is the scant attention paid to congregation proceedings by the Lord in His written Word.

The Brethren, with a restoration-seeking nature overall, began cooperative efforts with other church groups in the 1900's.† Many others should do the same.

* McAllister, Tucker, Journey in Faith, page 139.

** Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 37-8.

^† Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 50.

^† McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, page 373.

† Bowman, Brethren Society, pages 357, 4-5, 74, 361-2 respectively.

† In Durnbaugh, Church of the Brethren, page 49.

†† Brown, Simulations on Brethren History, page 25 and similar pages in a theme.

††† Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren, page 311.

*† In Casey, Foster, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 336.

² John Mark Hicks's contribution in Baker, Evangelicalism & the Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 95-6.

³ Many people in forerunner groups and in the Restoration have assumed that Scripture has for a primary purpose 'church assembly handbook.' This lead to strange disputes. Among the Haldaneans there was this polite dispute: whether to start meetings with prayer or hymn.* Passages: 1 Timothy 2:14 "First of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks" versus "Enter into his courts with praise" Psalm 100:4.* Neither passage addressed congregation assembly. Haldaneans helped ministers of any denomination and mitigated bitter feelings between denominations** common then.

* Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, pages 52-3.

** Casey, Foster essay in Casey, Foster The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 33.

Christians regardless of denomination.¹ The Haldaneans planned to not be a new denomination and associated with Congregationalists, but split away.² The Haldaneans were not the only predecessors.

The Restoration³ⁿ goal: to forsake denomination distinctives and loyalties, and pattern congregations per the New Testament and that only,⁴ⁿ as a means of facilitating goodwill and unity to serve the Lord as just Christians like in the New Testament.⁵ⁿ Restoration obstacles included

- scant information was accessible then to understand the Scriptures in the ways that New Testament-era readers/hearers would have understood Scripture's texts at their time and in their part of the world;
- many Christians did not see substantial merit to 'doing church' in any of the ways from nearly 2000 years past and across an ocean away, and many Restorers refused to be non-factious over this disagreement;
- assumption that the New Testament-era church was denomination-like with a sizable set of religious tenets and common practices, and that the New Testament had 'congregation handbook' as a primary purpose;
- it was still assumed that Christian unity depended on agreement over congregations' separate meetings;
- factiousness and lack of humility: many saw no need for life-long study of Scripture to learn nor difference between what Scripture says versus their inferences, and were insistent upon being agreed with.

These problems were worsened by people who neglected unity to focus exclusively on primitivism.⁶ⁿ

The first problem caused many to have bad disagreements with the rest of the church. 1800's American frontier Christians usually had only the King James Version 1769 edition. Unaware of factors regarding translation, many thought what it said was exactly and simply what New Testament-era Christians would have read/heard. They also commonly assumed that how 1800's Americans would perceive a statement in normal conversation is exactly how ancient New Testament-era people across the planet would have understood it. The masses did not know that these were not always so - resulting in bad inferences of Scripture that are still a problem as of c. 2000.

The second and third problems came from thought like 'That was nearly 2000 years ago; there is no reason to do that now.' Scripture never indicates a uniform congregation pattern extant,⁷ let alone taught; to the contrary, 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 and 14:40 told a chaotic congregation to arrange an order and introduced guidelines, as it appears congregations were commonly expected to arrange orders without such guidance. Also, Scripture, which per 2 Timothy 3:16-7 is a "person who serves

¹ Toulouse, Joined in Discipleship, pages 27, 31.

² Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, page 17.

³ An early event of the Restoration was an 1801 camp meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists got together and preached.* Military personnel estimated that 20,000 to 30,000 people attended.** This meeting and other meetings like it were reported to have changed the moral character of Kentucky and Tennessee.^* When Christians urge people to live godly lives for Christ as Matthew 28:19-20 told us to do, and work together focused on that aim, great things can happen.

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

** B. W. Stone, Rogers, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, page 37.

^* Vos, Exploring Church History, page 135.

⁴ In Scripture, a Christian is simply a follower of Jesus Christ, and a congregation simply an assembly of them. See Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church" for details.

Not all congregations operate in New Testament-era ways, but biblically **church congregations are made by people, not happenings**. Boasting against others of being 'New Testament this-or-that' based on congregation events is not warranted.

⁵ In the New Testament, being a follower of Christ was enough for truly unmitigated congregation standing -- all privileges available. At some places that boast of being 'New Testament churches' against other Christians, the Christian has been 'expected' to adopt additional religious tenets for the Christian to be 'fully acceptable.'

Given the Bible meaning of "church," one would think correctively 'restoring' this would be seen as important. It should be enough to just be a follower of Christ.

⁶ Restorationism and unity are not mutually exclusive. As Jesus Christ's apostles oversaw New Testament-era congregations, there is great merit to adhering to their common practices -- but **there is no merit to factiousness against Christians not convinced to this ideal**.

⁷ Noted by Stephen J. England, quoted by Ralph G. Wilburn in his article in Blakemore, The Renewal of Church (ed. Osborne, Volume 1 Renewal of Tradition), page 1:221.

God" (ICB) 'handbook,' has scant hints on any congregation's assembly proceedings; there are not enough hints to sketch without human conjectures even one New Testament-era meeting at one congregation from start to finish. Many outside the Restoration knew there was no Bible-ordained congregation pattern, and were not convinced to reinstate in their congregations even common practices of the New Testament era. Many Restorers became factious against those congregations.

The fourth and third problems came from before the Restoration. As of c. 2000, many denominations are just associations of congregations. This was not so when the Restoration began. Denominations tended toward ill-will and aggressive hostilities¹ due to disagreements.²ⁿ Many people thought that precepts, rather than followers of Christ, make churches. Restorers often saw unity as dependent on congregations agreeing on a New Testament-like state and going to it.³ⁿ Unity of Christians was seen as dependent on congregations, rather than on personal Christian effort.⁴ⁿ

The fifth problem possibly harmed the Restoration most. Many saw no distinction between 'This Scripture passage says' versus 'I say this Scripture passage teaches such-and-such.' They lacked humility to accept that they had opinions, or that their 'The Bible teaches' ideas may be wrong. Many also lacked humility to see a lifelong need to study Scripture to learn; the 1830's began an upsurge of people who forsook such efforts and focused instead on defending "gains of the past"⁵ whether valid or not. There was little-to-no willingness to reconsider⁶ⁿ any such alleged "gains of the past."⁷ⁿ Many factious agreement-fixated people switching group allegiance to the Restoration did not repent; they just changed to insisting that everyone 'do church the New Testament way' - their opinions on that, of course - and held church unity conditional on that.⁸ⁿ When non-Restoration groups did not do what they saw no merit to, and/or did not adopt 'enough' of many Restorers' errors which those Restorers would not re-examine,⁹ⁿ conditions for unity satisfactory to many Restorers did not exist.

¹ Davis, How the Disciples Began and Grew, page 16.

² Tragically, some parts of the Restoration remain this way as of two centuries later, while most of the church has left behind this high level of acrimony.

³ Even as of c.2000, factious Restorationists view the calls of Scripture away from division and toward unity as commands for 'everyone else' to join their groups.

⁴ A contributing problem in the Restoration is a common adherence to an 1800's idea of church unity: union of all church congregations into one church group. The Churches of Christ/Independent Christian churches suffer from this, as does the Disciples of Christ General Manifestation. The former usually try to get all Christians to join their group/s; the latter attempts mergers. That 1800's model should be discarded.

⁵ Richard Hughes's contribution to Dunnivant, et al, Founding Vocation & Future Vision, pages 59, 61-62.

⁶ Some members of these groups truly think they would reconsider anything when really they would not. Many get convinced to see some group precepts as 'settled' and cannot imagine them wrong. Some have a lot of trust in their group, and cannot imagine their group being wrong. Some have a lot of loyalty for their group and its heritage, and feel it their duty to affirm the rightness of their group and its heritage. Whether for these reasons or others, they cannot fully consider objections to some precepts.

⁷ This is why 'study with' sessions by Church of Christ promoters are often not 'study with.' Often, it is only one way: Church of Christ promoters tell outsiders what they 'should' think Scripture teaches, but expect to learn nothing from outsiders.

It is common in the Churches of Christ to assume that they are the only group whose people have studied Scripture on their own to learn what it teaches. Of course, this is not a valid assumption.

Another common Church of Christ assumption is that if they can seem skillful in tactics of debate and other efforts to look 'better than everyone else,' the views they hold are true. This assumption is also invalid; tactics do not determine truth.

⁸ Alexander Campbell, after detecting the growth of exclusivism in the Restoration movement, mellowed his attacks on other church groups, and tried to counterbalance those growing tendencies -- Knowles, In Pursuit of the True Church, page 237.

⁹ Insisting these are 'clear teachings of Scripture' does not make them teachings of Scripture at all.

Perhaps the best thing the Restoration did was restore heed to New Testament precepts that acts of dividing are carnal sin to shun. There were serious failures to rightly follow these teachings,¹ⁿ

¹ We will start with the oldest such error: opposition to open membership. Open membership is congregations not creating a division to exclude Christians who are not properly baptized. The first congregations of the Restoration accepted unimmersed Christians into membership.* Some of those congregations even had people who held the Quaker view and had never had any water ceremony at all.** The early and influential Brush Run Church did not require immersion for membership from 1811 until changing in June 1812.^* Many early congregations refused to abandon the older practice and make any such change.** By c. 2000, open membership had become common again.

Acts meticulously records Christian baptism, and none for Apollos; the example of Apollos in Acts 18:24-8 shows that baptism as a Christian is not a must-have for acceptance by the church. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44[†] and "believers" (NASB) in such places as Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7 and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe those in Christ's church. Scripture has "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB): μαθητας "disciples" is plural for Greek meaning "one who follows one's teachings."^{††} Even if such a person fails to be properly baptized, s/he is a Christian. Open membership is a simple matter: any congregation of the Lord's church is within the Lord's church, and the Lord's church is His -- not ours. It is sheer presumption for any mortal to think s/he can refuse a Christian a place in any congregation of the Lord's church.

Before we go on, factious Restorationists redefine "denomination" as 'group we disagree with,' and use "denominationalism" as a self-excusing replacement for 'being factious.' Non-factious associations of congregations are not addressed in Scripture. Factiousness against Christians is addressed -- negatively. Opinions on what Scripture does not address should not 'trump' Scripture's mandates on what it does address.

Factious Restoration groups often want to stay separate, and have others join them. Our first illustration, coming from the Churches of Christ:

"Unless the church of Christ is different from all other religious institutions it has no lawful right to exist as a separate body. Unless these differences are necessary, and unless they can be found collected in no other body, we likewise have no right to exist."^{†††}

There are many people who study Scripture with a primary aim of defending their group's existence as a faction. Of course, even if the group could be shown wrong on something, it would not mean that the group must disband as an association of congregations. Match the quoted statement with "the movement has pleaded with denominationalists to meet us at the feet of the Lord and his apostles."^{*†} Someone in the Churches of Christ/Independent Christian churches described

"the liberating sense of freedom I received in a class taught by Professor Woodrow Phillips at Ozark Christian College many years ago. He said, 'Suppose I find some church down the street practicing something that we had not been doing, but that the Bible clearly commands. If that happened, I would not leave the Christian Church and go join that congregation. I would stay where I am and just start practicing the new truth I had learned from God's Word.'

That's it in a nutshell"

but wrote "we gladly welcome into the membership of our churches other penitent immersed believers who want to unite with us."^{*††} This idea is common: 'We are not going anywhere, but we encourage others to join us, provided we find them acceptable.'

In Scripture, commands against factiousness and to strive for unity were to the whole church. It is common for factious Restoration groups to see these commands as applying to 'everyone else' and to see themselves as exempt from these commands.

* DeGroot, New Possibilities for Disciples and Independents, pages 34-5.

** Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, pages 119 and 120.

^* Belcastro, The Relationship of Baptism to Church Membership, page 22.

† Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 104.

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

††† Gayle Oler quoted by Foster, Will the Cycle Be Unbroken?, page 60.

*† Ford, A History of the Restoration Plea, page 173.

*†† S. E. Stone, Simply Christians, pages 42 and 54 respectively.

but heed to these teachings has been restored. The New Testament-era church shows no sign of a large set of agreed-on distinctly-religious tenets. Scripture reflects no interest in such¹ⁿ; 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-9 say to "shun foolish questionings" (ASV) unrelated to "good deeds" and "godly life" (NLT 1996). Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχοστασια "standing apart" ² and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Romans 14 shows that New Testament-era Christians were not expected to agree on religious details, so differing thought was irrelevant to unity in the New Testament-era church.³ⁿ The Restoration did well to bring people's attention to Scripture's teachings to strive for unity in the church even as the groups had failures to apply them rightly.⁴ⁿ

As non-Restoration denominations did not join the Restoration, factious men took over parts of it. Factious people fixated on group agreement have great trouble serving the Lord with any whom they disagree with; to them, such is unimaginable to utterly repulsive. When disagreement exists, factious people see it as reason to divide, and do so - and blame others for the division.

¹ That is why many modern disputes remain unresolved; the New Testament reflects neither existence of nor commonly-held views on them then -- **nor concern for answering them.**

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

³ The Disciples of Christ part of the Restoration body has restored this.

⁴ We have discussed failures of heavily factious portions, but some in the Disciples of Christ have done poorly too. The 1960's Restructure created the General and Regional Manifestations from agencies that before were subject to the congregations. In the 1960's a leader of one of those agencies, the International Convention, said:

"We must have an organization that can move together if we are to have an effective witness. This needs to be achieved, even if it means a breaking away of the anti-organization wing of the Christian Churches, a possible loss of 2,700 churches and 650,000 members."*

1967 membership was 1.9 million** so this was over one-third. To this person, this agency, which was set up to serve the congregations, merited having his interests for its "witness" put above them. This was while the General Manifestation was being made!

After Restructure, the General Manifestation ceased to be forthcoming on their activities for their own ideas of 'witness' -- which have often been at much discord with Scripture. "At least we are not fundamentalists" appeared as a notable excuse for ineptness with the Bible,^* and knowledge of the Bible was attributed negative stereotypes.^* In 1975, the General Manifestation passed a resolution opposing capital punishment[‡] -- despite that Romans 13:1-5 says civil government was "ordained of God" to bear "the sword" against those who "doeth evil" (ASV). They also passed a resolution urging no judgment on the wrongness of killing unborn children[‡] -- despite that Christ Himself placed "murders" among "evil things" (ASV) at Mark 7:21-3!

Congregations have had problems with the General Manifestation's caricatures of the whole denomination as being 'on board' with such things. Some congregations leave to protest, but others to get relief. This denomination was one of the fastest declining denominations as of 1994.^† While denomination leadership seeks 'union' and 'partnership' with other left-wing highly-political denomination leaderships, as of c. 2000 no such effort exists to maintain union within their own denomination. To the contrary, the General Manifestation has Resolution 9516 where they "remove" congregations for not replying to them^{††}! The 'unity effort' is a selective farce.

Men such as D. Newell Williams have insisted that the liberals must start listening to the conservatives, and urged academicians to be less aloof from the congregations[†] -- both of which say a lot about the General Manifestation's long-time attitudes. 1 Corinthians 12 urges us to value everyone in the church; Disciples leadership has often not done so even in their own denomination.

* Loren E. Lair quoted by Murch, The Free Church, page 112.

** Harvey, Setting Disciples Free, page 67.

^* Boring, Disciples and the Bible, pages 426 and 449 respectively.

‡ Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, pages 52 and 51-52 respectively.

^† Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, page 64.

† Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 520.

†† Hamm, 2020 Vision, page 124.

Those in the Restoration generally called themselves "Christians" or "Disciples." A quarrel in the large Restoration body¹ⁿ was on musical instruments in assembly.²ⁿ God invites such from "everything that hath breath" (ASV) at Psalm 150, but some add a ban on it because most of the New Testament³ⁿ never mentions it⁴ⁿ explicitly.⁵ⁿ Anti-instrumentalist Daniel Sommer predicted a split and wrote "Hallelujah" in 1889.⁶ Several people asked the 1906 United States census officials to list them distinct from the rest of the movement.⁷ David Lipscomb, a group leader, informed the director of the 1906 U. S. census that his group was disparate,⁸ already had a list made with a partner,⁹ and initiated a formal split from the rest of the movement¹⁰ⁿ as a separate group of Churches of Christ.¹¹ⁿ

Throughout the late 1800's and the early 1900's, Restoration congregations outside of the adamantly non-instrumental stripe published a *Year Book* in which their congregations were listed.

¹ The Christian Connection was not in this.

² Traditional church musical instruments were a commodity on the American frontier and many church persons came to disdain them.* Successors of them have tried to misuse 'weak faith' Scripture verses, claiming that actions Scripture permits should be banned to not 'offend' the 'weaker brother.' 1 Corinthians 8 shows it is good to refrain from biblically-permitted acts to not get a "weak" Christian to do something s/he thinks s/he should not do -- while s/he grows toward "knowledge" (ASV).

These modern 'weak brethren' intend their 'weakness' to be permanent and spread to others. This is unacceptable; in Scripture, 'weakness' is to be matured out of.

Still, some congregations wanting to use musical instruments may need mixed song time: some songs sung with accompaniment, and some not. People present would decide whether to sing or refrain on each song as comfortable.

* J. North, Union in Truth, pages 221-3 and 248-9.

³ New Testament-era Revelation 5:8-14 reports John present with *πρεσβυτεροι* "elders" = congregation leaders "each holding a harp" (ESV) as they "sing" (ASV) to the Lord. It is unrealistic to think "sing" means the harps were not used for their purpose.

⁴ The New Testament NEVER mentions special trained song-leaders to replace this, Bibles divided into verses with verse numbers added, or led prayer whatever term is used. Among such groups, the silence ban is invoked inconsistently and selectively.

Non-mention does not always forbid, nor always permit; non-mention sometimes means neither of these and can mean something else -- and often means nothing at all.

⁵ Acts 13, 14, 17, and 18 report Christians participating in synagogue worship, and synagogues had shofars, a type of horn.* Acts 2:46 reports Christians "day by day, attending the temple together" (ESV); daily temple services had choirs singing with instrumental accompaniment.** The instruments were a trivial detail unworthy of note.

* Archaeological Study Bible, page 1783.

** Punton, The World Jesus Knew, pages 124-5.

⁶ Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 392.

⁷ DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, pages 151-2.

⁸ J. North, Union in Truth, page 251.

⁹ Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 400.

¹⁰ Foy Wallace's legacy was 'fanning flames' of Church of Christ fights. Later, he came to deny merit of these fights, but many younger people took up fights he forsook.*

Many people love contentions so much that they would reject the matured wisdom of people who left behind divisiveness after years of it. Let us beware of that.

*Harrell, The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century, pages 177-8.

¹¹ The name is reflective of these groups' usual focus on group matters, rather than on individual following. A fixation on 'worship group'-related matters led to "Churches of Christ" whose prominent people serve their own interests as a 'worship group,' and have no real qualms disregarding Christ's ways to promote them. Such "Churches of Christ" must be distinguished from real Church of Christ congregations.

There are Christians among them, but Matthew 18:20 "two or three are gathered in my name" (ESV) does not apply; in ancient times, a person's name summed up the whole person,* so groups not gathered for what Christ's Name is about do not meet in His Name.

THERE IS NO POINT IN TRYING TO IMITATE 'THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT' DURING MEETING TIME
IF THE PERSON DOES NOT FOLLOW THE JESUS CHRIST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

*in Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1519.

Many of those also participated in cooperative ventures. In the 1960's, the Christians/Disciples did a major Restructure to make cooperative activity and unity ventures more efficient.¹ⁿ After Restructure was finished in 1968, thousands of congregations requested withdrawal from the *Year Book*,² starting

¹ Irresponsibility with personal opinions has since hampered both greatly. Disciples denomination leaders often make needless expressions of personal political-social and theological liberalism by way of denomination business. This diverts denomination resources off-task to personal secular agendas, puts a rift in efforts of the overall denomination, harmfully misrepresents Disciples as a whole, alienates would-have-been members, and hurts biblical conservative groups' receptiveness to Disciples as a whole.

Fortunately, congregations are autonomous and members are not pressed to agree. Sadly, the Disciples of Christ were one of the fastest declining denominations as of 1994,* and I see eight big causes. **First**, evangelism is sometimes devalued, which results in fewer new Christians. **Second**, many people have no concept of denominations that do not expect agreement. They wrongly think that radically-liberal theological and socio-political statements by non-laity are 'expected' party-line belief and shared by most Disciples. They think that they and the Disciples would be a bad fit.

Third, more-conservative denominations seem to have more consistent church attendance. A likely reason for this is belief in the Bible's directive to assemble at Hebrews 10:24-5; if the Bible is not always to be believed, as liberals hold, then church assembly will not always be seen as necessary. **Fourth**, because Christians who make church attendance a priority are often Bible believers, they prefer primary guidance for Christian living exclusively from God's written Word, rather than Scripture mixed with non-Scripture opinions. **Fifth**, the General Manifestation is not always quick to stand for believing what the Bible says, and too often does not. However, they often refuse to stay out of secular socio-political controversies that good Christians disagree over; they are often quick to take sides, and take the denomination with them -- including disagreeing majorities. Christians most likely to make church attendance a priority are biblical conservatives; they would want to support the church in work which Christ preached in the Bible, such as evangelism and simple benevolence -- NOT see praising reports of taking sides in dubious secular socio-political controversies, secular activism, and related criminal activity.

Sixth, some members seek relief from being suspected of supporting these excesses. **Seventh**, some members seek relief from feeling like they are supporting these excesses. **Eighth**, many Disciples of Christ leaders push crossways with the denomination's base. The Restoration Movement was steeped in Bible belief, and before Restructure, the Disciples and Independent Christians were the same denomination; Christians with similar views on reliability/authority of Scripture and church work priorities made the constituency of Disciples of Christ congregations. However, denomination leadership has sought most in common with heavily-liberal denominations such as the United Church of Christ. Disciples denomination leadership has often 'under-respected' the sentiments of the Disciples' heritage constituents, and it is destroying the denomination -- and thereby a witness to biblical unity.

Disciples denomination leaders have tended to needlessly alienate biblically conservative Disciples to the point that whole congregations withdraw. They do not even keep their denomination together. They are working against biblical unity.

Whatever is claimed, 'off the wall' statements and actions by denomination leaders can typically be disregarded as NOT representative of a sizable-to-majority portion of the Disciples of Christ -- leaders are not proactive in even informing the latter. Jesus Christ taught at Matthew 20:25-6

"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. |But it should not be that way among you.| Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant'" (NASB|ICB|TNIV).

Christian unity would be better promoted if denomination leaders would stop pushing their own agendas and instead be servant-leaders per Christ's teaching.

If denomination leaders would not claim that their personal opinions are 'the position of the Disciples of Christ,' it would help. Also prospectively helpful: not misappropriating denomination resources, time, and name for personal agendas. This denomination is a portion of the LORD's church, and leaders should treat it so.

* Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, page 64.

² J. North, Union in Truth, page 345.

another split from the larger original strand of the Restoration. Some such congregations were not participating before then, but some had been. Many requests were caused by a misinformation campaign by "independents"¹ⁿ that involved mailings with withdrawal forms and letters claiming falsely that Restructure threatened congregations' freedoms and property, and upon correction some congregations reversed their withdrawals.² Unfortunately, a common concern among withdrawing congregations was proactiveness on unity; they feared the others would get them involved indirectly with groups that they wanted no involvement with.³ After Restructure, the Independent Christians 'fizzled' off,⁴ⁿ and the Disciples of Christ⁵ⁿ overall⁶ⁿ continued onward pushing biblical unity.⁷ⁿ

¹ People that stayed well-informed about the Restructure did not share this confusion and opposed little of what was going on.* History is full of schemes like the above. Many "independents" refrained from joint ventures, and were not content to do so just for themselves -- they would try to hinder joint efforts and get others to do the same.

*Tucker, McAllister, Journey in Faith, page 444.

² Teegarden, We Call Ourselves Disciples, page 25.

³ J. North, Union in Truth, page 344.

⁴ Oddly enough, many Independent Christians hold that the Disciples split from *them!*

⁵ The Disciples of Christ denomination is **NOT** hierarchical; in the United States and Canada it has three areas: local congregation, Regional Manifestation, General Manifestation. Each congregation freely runs its own affairs, and each Manifestation is independent of each other and the congregations.* The Regional Manifestation coordinates filling local needs beyond scopes of local congregations. The General Manifestation is to oversee denomination-wide cooperative efforts, make statements on social concerns, and coordinate relations with other religious groups.*

Denomination leaders are often unwilling to keep their own personal opinions just personal, portraying them as 'the position of the Disciples of Christ.' This includes personal opinions which deny that what the Bible says is indisputably true, or which discord with Scripture. This also includes personal opinions in secular socio-political controversies where who is 'in the right' is reasonably debatable -- matters in which the denomination has no real business, should not meddle, and should not be dragged into. Most active attention of the General Manifestation has been in world affairs,** which shows their overall greater interest in things of the world.

Fortunately, due to congregation autonomy, the General Manifestation rarely affects Disciples -- and even then, it is usually only annoyance or embarrassment.

The departure of many conservative congregations helped skeptics of Scripture and non-Christian 'religious' secular activists get easier influence in this church group. This is another illustration of the harm of dividing due to disagreement.

* Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, page 64.

** Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, page 53.

⁶ Contrary to what some think, restorationism and church unity are NOT contradictory or mutually exclusive. An example of this type of claim is this one about the early 1800's Disciples by a 1987 Disciple: "They were naive in seeking to unite Christ's broken church on the basis of New Testament Christianity."* This is not correct.

The only Christianity is New Testament Christianity, because the New Testament tells us what is involved with being a Christian. What went wrong was a large-scale failure to understand New Testament Christianity. Christianity is not affairs of church congregations. In Scripture, being Christian is simply being a follower of Christ's teachings. If Christians would simply take the Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian," base their understanding of Christianity on it, and extend that to congregations and intercongregational relations, biblical church unity would follow.

* Cartwright, People of the Chalice, page 110.

⁷ 1992 data reports 48% of Disciples believing in inerrancy of the Bible* -- nearly half. Disciples of Christ are commonly more biblical than how they are portrayed by denominational leadership, as is often true in denominations with liberal reputations.

To seek church unity, Disciples denomination leaders try organizational administrative gestures with organization leaders of other denominations. In contrast, many Disciples use the Bible way to church unity: Christ's servants making a collective mutually-supportive effort to follow Jesus Christ's teachings together.

* Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 503, 522.

Since Restructure, the Disciples of Christ have had an organizational model that has hurt the denomination as a whole.¹ⁿ However, many congregations and individuals continue to do well serving in biblical unity. They simply serve with other Christians regardless of religious agreement.

¹ C. 2000 denomination leaders of the Disciples of Christ commonly have agendas very disparate from those of many Disciples. The most attention of the General Manifestation has been in world affairs,* showing overall greater interest in things of the world.

We note a primary source.** In 1988, a "Churchwide Planning Conference" wrote a booklet of "Needs and Suggested Actions" -- and in the "Mission" section we see "Objective: To involve persons in all congregations in significant mission, so that

1. the needs of those in the margins of society are met;
2. unjust or oppressive social structures are transformed; and
3. these actions lead to even wider involvement, both numerically and ecumenically."**

I edited nothing out; there is no mention of Jesus Christ in this "Objective" of "Mission." These are good concerns -- but a church organization should include in its "mission" something about serving Jesus Christ and His teachings.

Disciples denomination leaders are sometimes unbelievers who only 'esteem' Jesus. They are often more interested in radically left-wing socio-political activity and related expressions of theological liberalism than in priorities Christ stated for His church. Often, they even go against what is known to be stated in Scripture.

The General and Regional Manifestations were Restructured from agencies formerly subject to congregations. The General Manifestation and Regional Manifestation do not have authority over the affairs of congregations; congregations are entirely free to disregard any input from those Manifestations, and often do. These Manifestations normally do not affect Disciples except for perhaps aggravation and/or embarrassment. Unfortunately, the Manifestations are also independent of the congregations.

The Disciples of Christ grew 71% from 1900-1950.[†] 1960 statistics show growth from 1832 until 1960, at 1.8 million.^{††} In 1967, the year before Restructure was finished, they reached 1.9 million, and from then to 2001 there was a 57% decline.^{†††}

Denomination leaders' excesses alienate many people and congregations to the point of leaving. Denomination leaders waste resources on administrative wrangling with some other denominations for "union," but do not do much to keep their own denomination together. This shows that their efforts in Christian unity are a farce.

As things are, the Disciples of Christ will diminish into even less relevance. It may dwindle away, or collapse and be replaced by another system. The former would be tragic. This church group offers common belief in unconditional, prompt, proper baptism of converts, while refraining from factiousness common in other Restoration groups. If the denomination folds and presents an opening for a better system, the potential for good influence correlates to how many conservative congregations remain.

As for denomination leadership's antics, Jesus Christ taught at Matthew 20:25-6 "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. |But it should not be that way among you.| Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant'" (NASB|ICB|TNIV).

Christian unity would be better promoted if denomination leaders would stop pushing their own agendas and instead be servant-leaders per Christ's teaching.

This denomination is part of the **LORD's** church, and leaders should treat it so. Its leaders should lead this part of the Lord's church to fulfill what He stated He wants His followers to do -- they should not set aside those priorities, and should not misappropriate the denomination's resources and name for personal agendas. There will be a time when bad leaders can no longer spurn Bible-following servants of Christ. This will either happen in their lifetimes, or afterward. If the unbelievers do not repent of hijacking this portion of the Lord's church for their misuse as a far-left political group, they will likely cower before an angry Lord Jesus Christ.

What those people do is ultimately their problem. Let the majority Christians within the Disciples of Christ continue to serve Jesus Christ faithfully therein.

* Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, page 53.

** Churchwide Planning Conference, Dynamic Faith Communities, page 31.

† A. T. DeGroot's article in Loetscher, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, page 1:340.

†† A. T. DeGroot's article in Pugh, Primer for New Disciples, page 86.

††† Harvey, Setting Disciples Free, page 67.

Since Restructure, Churches of Christ have had partial 'reunion' with Independent Christians. The main premise has been mutually-acceptable agreement on religious tenets, rather than Scripture's terms. In c. 2000, talk urging unity is common among them - as is avoiding or resisting meaningful action with groups they disagree with; of three U.S. Restoration groups, two remain mostly factious.¹ⁿ

History has a unity movement that resulted in two denominations with substantial portions of their congregations being among the most divisive as of c. 2000.²ⁿ Something went wrong in the United States Restoration movement.³ⁿ The Bible can show us what went wrong if we will heed.

¹ To their credit, there are persons and even whole congregations among the Churches of Christ + Independent Christian churches that are straining to leave this legacy of factiousness. Small portions have drawn down barriers against other Christian groups. Degrees vary, and resistance fierce, but as of c.2000, it is slowly happening.

Also to their credit, both the Churches of Christ and Independent Christians still talk rightly about biblical authority. If Bible belief would be paired with accurate Bible teaching on divisiveness and unity, biblical unity could erupt.

² The Restoration fared even worse in Canada. Its roots were the U.S. Restoration and a similar movement in Europe.* At first, the movement in Canada was growing faster than in the U.S. but was joined by many Scotch Baptists, who were highly agreement-insistent.** Due to internal fighting and separation by long distances, Restoration groups in Canada totaled only about 110 congregations in the late 1900's.**

Let us consider U.S. parallels. On one end is the Disciples of Christ, one of the fastest declining denominations as of 1994.[†] A big reason is denominational leaders asserting personal opinions as 'The position of the Disciples of Christ.' They are unwilling to let their personal opinions remain just that, and label other people with those opinions against their will, prompting some withdrawals. It is regrettable that many Disciples congregations let the General Manifestation's irresponsibility influence them to leave, but it happens. They join the Independent Christian churches and associated Churches of Christ, and face more risk of influence from factious people in those groups. On the other end, in the mid-1900's, the argument-racked Churches of Christ showed more attention to details of religious tenets than morals/ethics, and many people left.^{††} A later study of them found 'accept versus be critical of' those who differ to be linked to church growth versus decline.[‡]

Romans 14:1-13a shows how New Testament-era Christians had differing views on religious details, and allows this status. Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."^{††} Christians were taught not to engage in acts of dividing. Christians were expected to not agree and yet refrain from acts of dividing. When church people insist on pressing their views onto other people in the church, they depart from the Bible way, and unsurprisingly the results are not good.

* in Matlins, Magida, How to Be a Perfect Stranger, page 58.

** Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 293 and 296 respectively.

† Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, page 64.

†† Hughes, Roberts, The Churches of Christ, page 145.

‡ Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, pages 32, 122.

†† Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT;

in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

³ New Zealand and Australia fared better as of the late 1900's: there was growth in the movement, with no Disciples/Independents distinction in either country.* Despite firm commitment to proper baptism, they participate in ecumenical activities with non-immersion groups.** In New Zealand, liberals and conservatives accommodate each other in one fellowship,* and in Australia, non-Charismatics and Charismatics came to tolerate each other.^* Scripture teaches Christians to accommodate each other in disagreement, and the Restoration there has done so. Just like the New Testament-era church, it is growing. Unsurprisingly, Bible ways and Bible results occur together.

* Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 302.

** Childers, et al, The Crux of the Matter, page 123.

^* Graeme Chapman's contribution in Foster et al, The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, page 52.

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); διχοστασια means "standing apart."¹ Divisive tendencies are just like tendencies to those other much-disdained sins listed in the passage. When people are not attentive to these fleshly tendencies, sin comes unnoticed.²ⁿ It has happened before.

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

² Here we will discuss a case study of what happens when factiousness runs its full course to an extreme. We will discuss radical "Churches of Christ" led by people more interested in their institution than in Christ. I hold these as distinct from legitimate Churches of Christ. We will use Denominationalism Versus the Bible.

We see this in the Forward: "THE BIBLE ONLY MAKES CHRISTIANS ONLY AND THE ONLY CHRISTIANS."* We find a chart "Sound Doctrine" with headings "WE SHOULD NOT SAY" and "WE SHOULD SAY" and therein we have "1. `Church of Christ **people**'" faced by "`Christians, God's children" to replace it. We also see "13. `Church of Christ Church'" faced by "`church of Christ, the Lord's church'" to replace it. Further, see "10. `quitting the Church'" faced by "`Quitting the Lord'" to replace it.**

They assert that only those within the self-named "Churches of Christ" are Christians. To them, to not be involved in their institution is to not serve Christ.

"Parents should not want their children to have the impression that a `good Methodist' is good because he is a Methodist. The Methodist is good to the degree that he has learned and applied Christ's doctrine to his life"^^* but to them, s/he is not a Christian. This is wrong. Acts 11:26 "the |followers| were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB|ICB|NASB); μαθητας is plural for "one who follows one's teachings"^^^ -- ANY person who learns and follows Christ's teachings is a Christian.

To many ultra-factionists, whom they are not is very important to them. We see a poem "I am a Christian" with ten "but I am not..." verses that refer to select denominations by name and ends "By the grace of God, I am a Christian."† Who the person is not is the focus of that poet's attention. Such persons are not `Christian only,' but rather are `Christian and not...' Christians truly `Christian only' focus mainly on their identities as followers of Jesus Christ -- not who they are against.

When people have their religious interests centered on the group they are part of, their religious interests are focused on desires of mortals -- possibly including themselves. This is seen in "it is impossible for one to `cross the line' into Christ without `crossing the line' into the church."†† Christ here is used as a tool of proselytizing to them. At this level of religious interest in themselves, interest in serving Jesus Christ according to His real ways might not exist.

Here we reach extremes: uncharitable and calloused attitudes against people. This is seen in "We desire to call all accountable men, women, boys, and girls back to this truth: THE BIBLE ONLY MAKES CHRISTIANS ONLY AND THE ONLY CHRISTIANS. To some people (unfortunately some even in the Lord's church today) this is `sectarian' or `patently impossible' or even `boring,' but WE BELIEVE AND WE KNOW - AND ARE EVEN EXCITED ABOUT IT - THAT SUCH THINKING IS WRONG - DEAD WRONG!"*

These people are "excited about" belief that only those in their religious institution are Christians. If they are right, untold numbers of Christians go to Hell, but this does not seem to concern them enough to prevent being "excited about" this belief, or to prevent disappointment that some do not share this belief.

It gets worse. There is "hate wearing the livery of love" and "malignant spirit"‡; people get "vicious" and common courtesy that would be given to strangers is withheld from the disagreed-with.‡‡ With uncharitable and malignant attitudes, and without genuine care for Jesus Christ's real ways, calling people `wrong' is far short of where they stop. **Free indulgence in factious lust can be corrosive -- let us all beware of that.**

* In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page FORWARD.

** In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page SOUND DOCTRINE.

^^ In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page 583.

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

† In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page "I AM A CHRISTIAN."

†† In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page 594.

‡ Ketcherside, In the Beginning, page 213.

‡‡ Phillips, Don't Shoot: We May Both Be on the Same Side, page 119.

It can happen again. As of c. 2000, there is a trans-denominational push for unity – on Scripture’s terms. As these efforts bear fruit, let us remember this lesson of history,¹ⁿ and be wary of urges from our carnal natures, lest we give up any progress we make.

From Some Early Restorers:

"We heartily unite with our Christian brethren of every name" – 1804.*

It is most unfortunate that many later Restorers refused that sentiment.

* Barton Stone and others, quoted by B. Stone in his autobiography in Thompson, *Voices from Cane Ridge*, page 85.

Topic #2 of 3: The Smaller Major Portion of the Restoration Movement

The other major part of the Restoration Movement was earlier than the larger Restoration body which led to the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches. It was identified by various names: the Christian Church, the Christian Connection, the Christian Connexion, and the General Convention of the Christian Church were among them.

It was a convergence of several groups that began in the late 1700’s and opening of the 1800’s. It was led by Elias Smith and James O’Kelley² and Abner Jones.³ One of the groups that eventually converged was about half of Barton Stone’s group that did not merge with Alexander Campbell’s group⁴ forming the larger Restoration body. The reasons for that arise from the differences between the larger Restoration body and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion.

One of the largest concerns was conceded to be valid by B. Stone: A. Campbell’s group had “an unwritten ‘theory of notions’” used “to measure the religion of others.”⁵ In that culture “religion” would have been synonymous with Christian life. The Christian Connection, in contrast with A. Campbell’s group, had no “unwritten theory of notions” used to “measure” Christian quality.

The Christian Church sought to emulate the first century church.⁶ They were resolutely biblical,⁷ uncompromising in New Testament faith,⁸ and insisted on cooperation among believers regardless of differences in thought.⁹ They distrusted uniformity.¹⁰ Uniformity of belief was not expected and not wanted.¹¹ One reason for this: “genuine religion can breath freely only in an atmosphere of freedom.”¹² Further, a consensus was that without any creed-like statement guiding Scripture inference, the Scriptures would be better understood and used more.¹³

Individual freedom in inference of Scripture was encouraged.¹⁴ An 1850’s effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: “This,” as one held up a Bible, “is what we believe.”¹⁵

¹ Factious Restorationists have been very militant with their factiousness. Example: in 1919 and the 1920’s, factious periodical *The Christian Standard* began publishing attacks on the United Christian Missionary Society because on the mission field, Chinese congregations were accepting Christians not properly baptized.* These attacks and calls to others to oppose the UCMS escalated up to the 1940’s.*

In Restoration polity, elders, not missionaries, oversee congregations. Had Independent Christian/Church of Christ insistence on ‘congregational autonomy’ been held to, they would have accepted these congregations’ right to set membership rules that do not divide against unbaptized Christians. Desires to 1) gratify factious lusts, and 2) ensure ‘proper respect’ to their cherished precepts on baptism, took precedence. Both of these remain common Restoration problems as of c. 2000.

* Corey, *Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy*, pages 71-2, then 198-208.

² Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, page 115.

³ Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, page 190.

⁴ Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, page 190.

⁵ West, *Barton Warren Stone*, page 191.

⁶ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 63.

⁷ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 47.

⁸ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 48.

⁹ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 47.

¹⁰ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 48.

¹¹ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 63.

¹² Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 63.

¹³ Bennett, *The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine*, pages 46-7.

¹⁴ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, *Theology and Identity*, page 36.

¹⁵ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, *Theology and Identity*, page 34.

The Christian Church/Connexion devised this list of "Five Cardinal Principles" in 1866:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, our only Creed or Confession of Faith.
4. Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of fellowship and church-membership.
5. The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all."¹

The Christian Church²ⁿ insisted on "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as quoted above and related to that, the necessity of toleration and cooperation among Christians who had differences in thought.³ As stated before, an 1850's effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: "'This,'" as one held up a Bible, "'is what we believe'"⁴ – a right sentiment to have.⁵ⁿ

The Christian Church accepted plurality of thought, but not plurality of lifestyle.⁶ The Christian Connexion associated the word "Christian" with ethics rather than "doctrine," and had piety and morals as definers of the church.⁷ An "obedient Christian" could not be made by assenting to a confession, creed, or similar statement if the person was not imitating Jesus Christ.⁸ In this Restoration body, how the Christian lived was of primary importance.⁹ⁿ

A concern of the Christian Connection about the other Restoration body was conceded as valid by B. Stone: A. Campbell's group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."¹⁰ The Christian Connection, unlike A. Campbell's group, had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality. They wanted to free common people from creeds¹¹ whether written or not. Elias Smith called for the liberty which the newly-born United States enjoyed politically to arise in the church religiously.¹² They believed the Bible, accepted difference in thought otherwise, and made Christian life primary in judging Christian quality.

¹ W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

² The reader may notice similarities between the Christian Connection and what this study advocates. I came to these views before knowing of the Christian Connection.

³ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

⁴ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 34.

⁵ It would be great if all church people who insist on accepting differing thoughts within the church would staunchly insist that God's Book is to be believed.

A premise frequently asserted by detractors of God's Book is that believing the Bible prevents unity in the church. History shows this false.

Truth: believing God's Book and accepting differences in religious thought among Christians is very doable. As of c. 2000 there are Christians in the Disciples of Christ who do that, and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion did that.

The Lord's cause would be greatly benefited if church people who insist on acceptance of differing views on religious details among Christians would staunchly insist that the God's Book is to be believed in its every detail.

⁶ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 37.

⁷ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 35.

⁸ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 64.

⁹ That is a contrast with the factious Restoration groups even as of c. 2000. It is all too common for a person who routinely behaves in ways inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings to be well accepted because s/he promotes the group's precepts.

If a person brazenly behaves in ways that show no following of Jesus Christ, but aggressively promotes group precepts, the conduct is viewed as unproblematic because 'S/he promotes the truth.' S/he is viewed as 'faithful' because s/he promotes 'the truth.' If anyone mentions how the person's conduct was inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings, the reply is 'Well, s/he was speaking the truth.'

In such groups, a person is made 'faithful' by ascribing to a group of precepts even if s/he has no use for the ways of Jesus Christ. This is in stark contrast to the view in the Christian Church.

¹⁰ West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

¹¹ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 50.

¹² Elias Smith 1808 article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, pages 30-1.

It is evident that the Christian Connection could not safely merge into the larger Restoration body. The larger group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."¹ The Christian Connection had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality. Rather, it insisted upon "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as one of its Cardinal Principles.² The Restoration was a staunchly Bible-believing movement, but the approach to handling Scripture was different between these two groups.³ As much of the larger Restoration body would insist on its "unwritten 'theory of notions'" being subscribed to in order to fully accept Christians in the Christian Connection, it was best the Christian Connexion not join it.

¹ West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

² W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

³ An example of the differences is in how the two Restoration groups handled Christians misled about baptism. We will discuss Scripture's teachings about baptism, then discuss the larger Restoration body and the Christian Connexion.

At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge."* Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

A common retort to justify improper modes of 'baptism' is along this line: "Do you think it makes any difference how much water is used? Why?"** Answer: it does not matter what we think. The Greek used shows that we need to use enough water to do as Jesus Christ said. We are to do as Jesus Christ told us to do -- period.

However, not all Christians understand that correctly. One problem is that the English word used to translate the Greek has meanings incompatible with the Greek word. The two Restoration bodies handled unbaptized Christians differently.

An example of the larger Restoration body comes from 1957 in Australia. The Churches of Christ there differ some with U.S. Churches of Christ, but both come from the larger Restoration body. Closed membership limits church membership to those properly baptized. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?' and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."** Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ.

While recognizing sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."**

A Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was beyond the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally they directed this attitude to acknowledged Christians: 'Christ might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as 'inadequate,' and brazen exclusivist factiousness.

In contrast, here is how the Christian Church in 1827 New England handled those not properly baptized: "'baptism is only one thing, viz., a burial in water; and that it is enjoined on believers only; that it is the duty of all believers to be baptized as soon as they are born again.'"^* This accords with Scripture. The practice of "'the elders and brethren'": "'they do not think a believer ought to be driven to submit to that command before he sees the duty, and do not think a brother should be shut out until he is baptized; but they consider their duty to instruct such in the way of the Lord more perfectly.'"^† That is a good approach to the matter of unbaptized Christians; it promotes Bible truths, but avoids factiousness.

* Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 391.

** My Church: An Adventure in Christian Fellowship, page 89.

^* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, page 81 then 155.

^† Quoted in Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 91.

Barton Stone was a leader in both groups. When about half of B. Stone's group did not merge with A. Campbell's group, it left about half that did. Shortly after that merge, adherents of A. Campbell's group began asserting their views on those who had merged with them.¹

The partial merge was not wise for anyone wishing for Christian unity. Barton Stone found that out too late. Late in life, he sat in his own congregation weeping as exclusionist messages were preached from his former pulpit against Christians who had been sprinkled² rather than properly baptized. B. Stone saw too late that the merge made him seem to approve of a narrow factionism,³ and he came to be portrayed as someone favorable to that cause.⁴ The cause of real church unity suffered too. Factionists in A. Campbell's group got an opening to recruit protégés from a group that was unity-seeking.⁵ⁿ The Restoration body that became the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches grew hordes of factionists that were destructive to it and other church groups. Overrun by factionists led to fewer unity-seeking Christians than could have been.

Fortunately, the merge was only partial. From its beginnings, the Christian Connexion held all Christians to be one regardless of differences in religious thought.⁶ It centered on advocating a broad fellowship of Christians.⁷ An 1874 *Manifesto* held unity to be mainly a matter of Christian spirit and character, not of "doctrine" or polity which was held impossible, in contrast to the only unity that was held possible, which was unity from love and forbearance which Christians should have.⁸ Unity with outside church groups had already been a basis for the Christian Church's venture.⁹ Its "mission" included something worded as so: "give a true fraternity to all Christians of all denominations."¹⁰

The General Convention of the Christian Church no longer exists. It merged with Congregationalists to form the Congregational Christians in 1931.¹¹ Throughout its 130+ year life, it demonstrated that unity can exist without uniformity of thought.¹²ⁿ While the Disciples of Christ struggled with factiousness, the portion of the 1800's Christian Connection that merged with them did contribute their tolerance of differing thought and wide fellowship parameters.¹³ The Disciples of Christ, as a body of congregations, did recover the original unity emphasis of the Restoration.

Topic #3 of 3: The Restoration and the Brethren Compared

Annotations in the prior topic referred to the Brethren. The Brethren exist in several denominations as of c. 2000, but the Brethren movement began in Europe in the early 1700's. They use similar terminology to many parts of the Restoration, and had parallels in their histories.

For instance, a former Brethren referred to a non-Brethren church as "denominational"¹⁴ like is common in the Churches of Christ, redefining 'denomination' as 'group other than ours.' Likewise, Restoration groups commonly claim the likes of "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible"; among Brethren "No creed but the New Testament" has been a common sentiment.¹⁵

¹ Morill, History of the Christian Denomination in America, pages 304-5.

² J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 272.

³ J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 272.

⁴ J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 273.

⁵ Merging groups is not necessarily a good idea. Organizational mergers are not necessary for biblical unity, and do not automatically facilitate it.

⁶ Fagley, The Congregational Christian Churches Part 1, page 79.

⁷ Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, page 47.

⁸ Gunneman, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ, page 165.

⁹ Gunneman, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ, page 163.

¹⁰ Dayton Christian Ministerial Association in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 29.

¹¹ Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 190-1.

¹² Please see Part 6/A *Trio of Positive Examples from History* for more about them. In Canada, this legacy became part of the United Church of Canada.*

* Hunter, The Congregational Christian Churches Part 2, page 42.

¹³ Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, page 48.

¹⁴ Cole, Roots, Renewal, and the Brethren, page 61.

¹⁵ Bowman, Brethren Society, page 357.

Forerunners to the Brethren included the 1600's-1700's Collegiants. They were groups interested in independent study of Scripture, who believed in adult baptism by immersion, in freedom for anyone to speak, in mutual toleration, and who welcomed all Christians regardless of denomination.¹ They had members of Reformed congregations, Mennonite congregations, other formal congregations, or no formal congregation,² and helped other church groups.³

The Brethren movement, like the Restoration movement, was strongly unity-seeking. We can see these in the statements of early Brethren leader Anthony Norris Groves:

"The basis of our fellowship is LIFE in the Christ of Scripture rather than LIGHT on the teaching of the Scriptures. Those who have part with Christ have part with us. Because our communion is one of life and love more than one of doctrine and opinion, we seek to show that the oneness in the life of God through Jesus Christ is a stronger bond than that of being one of us — whether organizationally or denominationally"

"Because our fellowship is based on our common life in Christ, we do not reject anyone because of the organization or denomination with which they may be affiliated; nor would we hold them responsible for the conduct within that system, any more than we would a child for the conduct in the home of which they are merely a part."

"We do not feel it desirable to withdraw from fellowship with any Christians except at the point where they may require us to do what our consciences will not permit, or restrain us from doing what our consciences require. Even then, we maintain our fellowship with them in any matter where we are not called upon to so compromise."

"We do not consider an act of fellowship to be indicative of total agreement; indeed we sometimes find it a needed expression of love to submit to others in matters where we do not fully agree, rather than to prevent some greater good from being brought about. Our choice would be to bear with their wrong rather than separate ourselves from their good."

"We believe it more scriptural to reflect a heart of love, ready to find a covering for faults, than to constantly look for that with which we may disagree. We will then be known more by what we witness for than by what we witness against."⁴

Unfortunately, this did not last. In the 1850's there was a split over unmet demands like "No Sunday-schools," "mode of feetwashing" and "no musical instruments" among others.⁵ Over such trivialities, some Brethren were not willing to stay in a fellowship even with other Brethren.

The Brethren in the United States in the 1800's were a victim of the way denominations normally operated back then: in exclusivist rivalry. When a large Brethren population crossed paths with the Restoration Movement, there was trouble. Alexander Campbell, a Restoration leader, had a different approach for unity than some earlier Restorers; he wanted to get all Christians united into one group, and Brethren leader Timothy Banger replied to such a contact "I do not see any reason why *we* should join *you*, that would not equally require *you* to join *us*!"⁶

There was other trouble. Brethren leaders Joseph Hostetler and Peter Hon led about 3000 Baptists, New Lights, Quakers, and Brethren to join in one group as the two leaders joined the Restoration movement.⁷ A Restorer/Disciple celebrated that Peter Hon had "laid aside two of his immersions,"⁸ leaving the Brethren practice of triple immersion. By 1826, Joseph Hostetler, Peter Hon, and their following were disfellowshipped by Brethren farther east.⁹ Brethren leaders at the Annual Meetings by the 1830's ruled denomination-wide not to accept single immersion baptism.¹⁰

¹ Willoughby, The Beliefs of Early Brethren, page 48.

² Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines, page 10.

³ Willoughby, The Beliefs of Early Brethren, page 48.

⁴ Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, pages 298-9.

⁵ As quoted in Cole, Roots, Renewal, and the Brethren, pages 61.

⁶ Sappington, Brethren in the New Nation, page 120.

⁷ Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 176.

⁸ Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 175.

⁹ Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 173.

¹⁰ Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 176.

Many frontier Brethren left the Brethren for the Restoration movement out of desire to cooperate with other Christians without interference from eastern Brethren.¹

Fortunately, there were better relations than these problems. In 1851, a Disciples evangelist in western Pennsylvania reported Brethren giving him a busy itinerary from invitations coming from "all directions to preach for them."² Likewise, evidently he was a good guest at Brethren assemblies.

Still, the problems could have been avoided. There was no need for the Restorers to try to get Brethren congregations to join their church group and abandon Brethren precepts. There was no need for Brethren to divide against Brethren who joined the Restoration.

What the Restorers/Disciples should have done is continue to seek Christian unity without regard to church groups. Witnesses of *The Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery*, which included Barton Stone, wrote "We heartily unite with our Christian brethren of every name" in 1804.³ The intent was to "unite with" Christians "of every name" rather than have Christians join them.

Likewise, Brethren should have continued their original track of accepting Christians regardless of disagreement or denominational affiliation, and trying to serve the Lord together as much as possible. The Brethren farther east should not have disfellowshipped Brethren who had joined the Restorationists. There is no general reason why congregations cannot have two affiliations.

Unlike most of the Restoration outside the Disciples of Christ, as of c. 2000 the Brethren have moved substantially from their factious past. The Brethren, even with a restoration-seeking nature overall, began cooperative efforts with other church groups in the 1900's.⁴

The Ecumenical Movement and other efforts for trans-denominational cooperation have produced many opportunities for trans-denominational cooperation, which the Churches of Christ and Independent Christian churches have tended to refrain from them.⁵ These have even refused to join the conservative National Association of Evangelicals because it had "fundamentalistic characteristics"⁶ⁿ and was too accepting of continued existence of separate denominations.⁷

In contrast, the Brethren have gone far away from their factious past. The Brethren have joined a cooperative organization called the National Council of Churches of Christ, which has most of the Eastern Orthodox denominations⁸ and liberal-led denominations. The National Council of Churches of Christ focuses on interdenominational cooperation in a variety of areas including evangelism,⁹ although some parts engage in inappropriate activity.¹⁰ⁿ The fact remains that Brethren participate in an interdenominational cooperative endeavor that involves meaningful action.

In 1948, the Church of the Brethren was a charter member of the World Council of Churches.¹¹ In the early years of the WCC, they were in association with the International Missionary Council.¹² The latter's activities centered on bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to areas with little to no

¹ Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, page 176.

² Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, page 176.

³ Quoted by Barton Stone in his autobiography in Thompson, *Voices from Cane Ridge*, page 85.

⁴ Bowman, *Brethren Society*, page 357.

⁵ Callen, North, *Coming Together in Christ*, page 41.

⁶ You read that right: these staunchly Bible-believing groups stayed off the National Evangelical Association for its "fundamentalistic" traits! As of c.2000, factious Restoration groups take any "reason" to avoid genuine participation in church unity.

"Dialogue" and other "talks" to resolve religious disagreements are neither meaningful action nor genuine participation in church unity.

⁷ James, North, *Coming Together in Christ*, page 41.

⁸ P. Williams, *America's Religions*, page 353.

⁹ P. Williams, *America's Religions*, page 353.

¹⁰ The NCC has unfortunately been dragged by bad leaders into controversial political causes and forms of liberalism. Due to this, it has faced attack by Christians within and outside of its member church groups, and made member church groups unhappy.*

* P. Williams, *America's Religions*, page 353.

¹¹ Bowman, *Brethren Society*, page 423.

¹² W. A. Visser 'T Hooft article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 2:1185.

Christian presence.¹ The WCC, in its early years, had an agency that enabled member church groups to share information regarding experience with evangelistic activities and new methods of evangelism.² The Church of the Brethren was a charter member of this cooperative scheme, even if it has not since gone well.³ⁿ The fact remains that the restorationist Brethren were among the first to participate in an interdenominational cooperative endeavor that involved meaningful action.

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); διχοστασια means "standing apart."⁴ Divisive tendencies are just like tendencies to those other much-disdained sins listed in the passage. May the whole church resist them as so.

FACT: Church division's end during the whole week does not depend on us agreeing during weekends. Such division can fade out if we put our all-day everyday task for Christ first: let us agree to disagree on weekends as needed, and focus on our common task to do good for Jesus Christ all day, everyday, all week, every week.

¹ Miner Searle Bates article in Loetscher, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ..., page 1:586.

² W. A. Visser 'T Hooft article in Loetscher, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ..., page 2:1185.

³ The WCC has had leaders who have given support to unpopular political, economic, and justice causes.* Such leaders have often engaged in political one-sidedness and even justified violent uprisings called for in some forms of liberation theology.**

There are WCC leaders, NCC leaders, and denomination leaders who misuse their positions to push agendas largely unwanted in these groups. Matthew 20:25-6 says "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. |But it should not be that way among you.| Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant'" (NASB|ICB|TNIV).

May such leaders who would be good Christians heed this teaching of Christ.

These leaders should be aware that these church groups are parts of the **LORD's** church, and leaders should treat them so. These leaders should lead these parts of the Lord's church to do what He stated He wants His followers to do -- they should not set aside those priorities, and should not misappropriate these church groups' assets for personal agendas. There will come a time when these bad leaders can no longer spurn Bible-following and Bible-respecting servants of Jesus Christ. This will either happen in their lifetimes, or afterward. There are such leaders who merely 'esteem' Jesus, but are not believers on Him. If the unbelievers do not repent of hijacking these portions of the Lord's church for their own misuses as far-left socio-political groups, they will likely cower before an angry Lord Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, Christians should not allow such people to influence them into abandoning unity-oriented ventures, and also the church should learn from the past. Such persons pretend to believe things they do not in order to get control of church groups' resources,^* and exploit unity ventures. The goal is promoting via religious means agendas that are church-inappropriate, and do so using church resources. It is common for religious unbelievers to call for "academic freedom"^\dagger to express views hostile to Christian faith while in church-sponsored positions. Often, the "academic freedom" they call for is only for them and others like them. Many seminaries and originally-Christian colleges have been made into places where Bible-believing academicians are 'not qualified,' and Bible-believing students are disdained -- and too often disallowed privileges, graded and/or 'disciplined' accordingly. It happens too often that a religious society claiming to be a church congregation that is "open to all" browbeats "born-again" and "any form of conservatism" and is "really" "open to all except conservatives."^\ddagger These hijackings are complete.

The church should seek ways to better safeguard itself and block such people from positions of influence. Also, we should not let the irresponsibilities of these people influence us to avoid unity ventures.

* David B. Eller's article in Durnbaugh, Meet the Brethren, page 85.

** D. F. Wright article in Ferguson, et al, New Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, page 220.

^* Machen, Christianity and Liberalism, page 165 and 167.

^\dagger In Criswell, Believer's Study Bible, page 1778.

^\ddagger From story in C. Berry, Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church, page 226.

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

Written and Unwritten Creeds, or Whatever Term – The Party Line

Many Christians have views they wish promoted in the church. They know that some people who do not share those views are Christians, but are unwilling to act meaningfully on this. In any congregation of Christ's church, whether someone is a follower of Jesus Christ should be preeminent.

At Matthew 16:18, Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). The process is shown at Acts 2:47, which reports that the Lord Himself was "adding to | them day by day" (NASB | ASV) each newly-saved convert. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44¹ and "believers" (NASB) in such places as at Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe Christ's people. Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. "Christians" = "disciples" in "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB) per Acts 11:26; Greek μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."² A Christian is 'one who follows Christ's teachings.' A Christian is someone who believes on Jesus Christ as to be a follower of His teachings in daily life. In Jesus Christ's church, any person who fits this criteria has been added by Him to His church.

In any congregation of Christ's church, the primary criteria of a person's standing ought to be whether someone is a Christian and added by the Lord Himself to His church. Sadly, often it is not. Rather, it is how well the person knows and stands for a collection of additional group precepts. Some of these collections are acknowledged creeds; some are called something else but are the same thing.³ⁿ The worst ones are unwritten and are not acknowledged to exist.

In many cases, the people treated most as being 'a part of the congregation' are those who best 'toe the party line' on denominational/'brotherhood'/'fellowship' distinctives regardless of how they follow Christ's teachings in overall life. The people put in places of responsibility are those who best 'toe the party line'⁴ⁿ regardless of how they follow Christ's teachings in overall life, or competency for the task. In politics, this is cronyism and it is illegal in some countries; on the basis of partisan loyalty, important state jobs are given to people far less-qualified for them. The exact same thing happens in the church: people very well-qualified for a task get passed over for people far less-qualified – for no other reason than who agrees 'faithfully' with the 'expected' group tenets.⁵ⁿ

¹ Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

² Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

³ Some 'not-a-creeds' are lists of 'expected' 'inferences' of Scripture that 'clarify' what people 'should' 'infer' from Scripture to be 'sound Christians.' Each one is every bit as much an extra-biblical authority as any acknowledged creed.

⁴ An example of a 'not-a-creed' creed was some rules in a Bible school's operations code. The items were "'not to be taken as a church creed or discipline'" but "'merely statements which disqualify men from places of authority in this institution" in the mid-1900's.*

This list of rules had the precise and expressed intent of determining a person's place in this church institution. The goal was to limit anyone who disagreed with this 'not-a-creed' creed to lesser positions. There are many such 'not-a-creed' creeds that are just as exclusivistic or more exclusivistic.

* DeGroot, New Possibilities for Disciples and Independents, page 65.

⁵ I can give a specific example from 2006 in the United States. A trained, licensed, and experienced school teacher was blocked from a teaching role in a congregation while people were being recruited for teaching roles. While non-educators were supervising and teaching classes of children, the school teacher was relegated to 'assisting' the recreation leader with several adolescents -- doing next to nothing.

This was suspicious. The problem was only found out after the congregation's primary leader was sought out in private and asked; the primary leader did not like the person's views on security of the believer and on baptism's role in salvation. It did not matter that the professional teacher had been careful to keep quiet about these views: he subscribed to only most of the unwritten creed, and so was assigned to a waste of his time while he was passed over for less-qualified personnel.

Another ill of such things: needed tasks left undone despite availability of qualified people.¹ⁿ In many groups, where a Christian 'stands' on their 1 Timothy 6:3-4/Titus 3:8-9 "unprofitable" (ASV) "disputes" (NKJV) and "strifes" (ASV) irrelevant to "a godly life" of "good deeds" (NLT 1996) is held most important - not the Christian's qualities as a follower of Christ Himself and qualifications for the task itself. This is wrong; the work of the Lord is too important for cronyism.

Unwritten creeds can cause Christians to be unexpectedly and/or secretly marginalized for views they did not know were 'unacceptable.'²ⁿ At Matthew 16:18 Jesus said "I will build My church" (NBV) - not 'our church.' We ought not act as if Christians are 'less Christian,' 'less faithful,' or 'less sound' based on creeds - whatever term is used.³ⁿ All Christians are in the Lord's church; it is no mortal's place to deny any Christian full standing in a congregation thereof based on such things.

¹ I can give a specific example of this happening. In 2007 a newly-established church congregation had a school teacher approach the pulpit minister about starting a children's ministry. The pulpit minister convened a meeting of the congregation's men. The pulpit minister and other men showered the teacher with questions about his views on their favorite bickerings with outside church groups. There were no questions about his experiences working with children, his qualifications, or his Christian walk. These bickerings would not have any relevance to children, but the men were not satisfied. The congregation remained without a children's ministry.

² An example comes from the United Kingdom in 2009 among a group which denies being a denomination. They see themselves as the Lord's church, and outside Christians as attending "denominational" institutions instead of meeting with 'the Lord's church.'

A woman in this group had served at a children's camp for years. On a secular website, she called the group a denomination. The wrong person saw this and summoned her. She was surprised, but for her violation of the 'We are not to be thought of as a denomination' precept of the unwritten creed, her role in ministry was taken away.

For more examples, we saw in *Part 6/A Lesson from History* how the Restoration began in the U.S. calling for no creed beyond Scripture. Still, a woman can come to one of these groups new, mention belief in the Rapture, and her welcome is shortened.* Someone might seek to connect to a congregation, mention belief to an elder that Christians stay saved, and get quickly ushered out the back door.* Christians new to these groups are often unaware these widely-held beliefs are 'deeply unacceptable.'

* Rick Grover article in G. Carson et al, One Church, page 53.

³ An example is from 1957 in the Restoration group in Australia, the Churches of Christ, which differ some with U.S. Churches of Christ; the subject: closed membership, which limits church membership to those properly baptized. As we studied in *Part 6/A Lesson from History*, the Restoration began in the U.S., and it called for no creed beyond Scripture. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?'" and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."*

Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ. While recognising sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."*

A Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was beyond the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally they directed this attitude to acknowledged Christians: 'The Lord might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as 'inadequate,' excluding members of His church from congregations thereof, and was brazen exclusivist factiousness.

* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, pages 81, 155.

Hebrews 12:1-2a: How the Christian Walks

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside [all that presseth downe], and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (ESV|Bish|ESV).

We are to "run" a "race" "set before us," "lay aside" any hindering weight, and be "looking to Jesus."

For an athlete in a footrace, other athletes do not mitigate the athlete's need to run; s/he must give an individual effort. Other athletes do not make the athlete inherently stronger; they might motivate the athlete to work harder, but they do not change the athlete's ability. Christian life is likened to a footrace here at Hebrews 12:1-2a; the Christian life hinges on individual, not group, effort.

In many church groups, people see the Christian walk as a group endeavor. They want to be in 'the right group,' choose 'the right group,' and show they did not 'err' in choosing 'the right group.' They then feel like a good Christians because they are in, are led by, and support 'the right group.'

Some see the Christian walk as a group effort, and not as an individual following of Christ.

A potential pitfall of group-focused Christianity is diverting attention from individual walk when not group-engaged. Bible study becomes little more than analysis of groups, and ultimately, into little more than 'hunt for ammunition' against outsiders¹ⁿ and fodder for self-congratulation.²ⁿ 'Favorite verses' get chosen based on these. "Christian service" becomes about attending group functions and about competition with outside church groups. At this extreme, the Bible user pays less, little, or no attention to parts of Scripture about life away from religious group settings.³ⁿ

The New Testament is not a manual for group meetings.⁴ⁿ *It never was intended to be a 'church constitution,'* but a handbook of Christian living. The Scriptures are provided to teach the individual person how to serve God rightly in overall life. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."⁵

2 Timothy 3:16-7 does NOT say 'group that serves God' but individual "person who serves God."

¹ Of course, others being wrong on something does not make any group right on everything.

In factious rivalry, a common fallacy is to assume that if every targeted group can be shown wrong on something, it means that the attacking group is right on everything. The approach is 'That group are wrong on this, this other group is wrong on that, every other group is wrong on this/that/the other; therefore, our group is the one you ought to join.' In reality, other groups' rightly or wrongly-alleged errancy does not make any group inerrant.

² **If a person gets a thrill from 'We and not them' gloating, s/he should beware of a factiousness + pride pair.**

Often, people in church settings begin discussions about things about their church group that they think makes them better than other church groups. This is natural, as they chose their group for reasons. This is not always wrong.

However, there are times when this arises to celebrating that outside church groups do not have these things. The real or wrongly-alleged 'down sides' of outside church groups are celebrated. The people become happy that not only are they 'better' than everyone else, but 'everybody else does not have what we have.' This is a factiousness + pride pair.

³ An illustration of just how much dispute-irrelevant portions of Scripture are undervalued: in one largely-factious church group, leaders have even forbade preaching Old Testament passages.* The Old Testament is quoted and exposted much in the New Testament, but as it is pre-church, it does not touch on church issues. Hence, it is seen as not meriting being preached on.

* Terry Briley's article in Baker, Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement Volume 2, page 265.

⁴ That is why it takes gleaning to get hints on New Testament-era congregation meetings.

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

In 1981 James W. Fowler initiated a theory of progressions of religious faith among Christians in the western world. It has six "stages," and "stages" 2-5 have non-rare appearance among adults. "Stage" 2 is found mostly in children, though some adults adapt a form of it; here, matters of faith are strictly one-dimensional: there is only one meaning to any religious communication of word or deed, and events are cause-effect.¹ "Stage" 3 is group-centered; the person entrusts a group for guidance on what beliefs to have.² "Stages" 4-5 are more individualistic: "Stage" 4 people feel more responsibility for their convictions and are willing to reexamine their own faith assumptions,³ and "Stage" 5 people are willing to look for and learn from what those in other groups can show them.⁴ My summary of his "stages" is very simplistic for brevity. I think of these "stages" more as types of faith, as my observations suggest people can have aspects associated with "stages" that are not next to each other.

J. Fowler observed that most middle-class American churches operate toward a "Stage" 3 group-centered faith as of 1981.⁵ In the decades surrounding 2000, my own experience among biblically conservative congregations and church-related groups is similar. 'Thinking for oneself' is encouraged so long as the group tenets are never doubted fully or more than briefly, and/or other groups are not shown 'too much' respect. Individual reflection of faith must be restricted within group norms among most such religious groups, or people get uncomfortable and reactionary.

Beyond the group-centered "Stage" 3 of faith, the believer is less extrinsically motivated to act on faith and more intrinsically motivated, and such believers are more likely to have a more committed faith.⁶ A Hebrews 12:1-2a direction of faith matches this. Luke 7:9 records Jesus using a Gentile's "great faith" (ASV) as an example for Israel. Jesus Christ wants believers to have strong faith.

Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁷ A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings. To be a Christian is to answer His call at John 21:22 "follow thou |Me" (ASV|NBV). It is an individual following.

When it comes to church congregations, Christians need to maintain a right focus for their Christian walks and faith. 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 to encourage Christian walk. Hebrews 12:1-2a says

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside [all that presseth downe], and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (ESV|BishB|ESV).

Let us note some things here: a running race is not a group effort, and we are each to be "looking to Jesus" – not any group. Our group is mutual encouragement, but the race is for us to run as persons.

We are also to "lay aside" whatever "presseth downe" to hinder us, and "sin." 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). διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."⁸ Divisive group fixation is a potential hindrance to our walks as Christians --which per Hebrews 12:1-2a are our own individual races as followers of Christ.

¹ Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 149.

² Fowler, Stages of Faith, pages 172-3.

³ Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 182.

⁴ Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 198.

⁵ Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 294.

⁶ Fowler, Stages of Faith, pages 300-1.

⁷ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

⁸ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

Attitude Problems and a Quartet of Biblically-Associated Sins

We now turn to certain contra-Scriptural attitudes that have appeared in the church and led to divisive conduct. We will answer them from the Scriptures.

Bad Attitude #1 of 2: 'Knowing' Too Much

Jesus at Mark 7:21-3 had a list of sins that begins "evil thoughts, sexual immorality," has "coveting," and ends "pride, foolishness" (ESV). Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and διχοστασια,¹ and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV); διχοστασια literally means "standing apart."² These two lists both have "sexual immorality" and describe the same level of carnality; unsurprisingly, "pride" and acts of division are transitively associated.

At Matthew 16:15-8, Jesus Christ was talking with His disciples, and 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.³ⁿ "Peter" is Πητρος and "rock" is πετρα. Πητρος means "a small stone" and πετρα means "a foundation boulder."⁴ Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πετρα: "'You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.'" This is the one premise upon which Christ's one church is built: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.⁵ⁿ The word "church" translates εκκλησια, used similarly in ancient Greek culture about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁶ This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ; per Acts 11:26 "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and is plural for Greek meaning "one who follows one's teachings."⁷ Hence, Jesus Christ said at Matthew 16:18 in essence 'I will build My community of people who follow My teachings.'

1 Timothy 1:5-6 has "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" (NASB). In the same epistle, at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, we see this warning:

"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, the Greek under "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."⁸ This is not about accuracy or agreement – this is about topic. Paul had strong words for anyone pushing a "different doctrine" that does not "draw near" to "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life."

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

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

³ We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations.

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

⁴ MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

⁷ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

⁸ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

As we see from 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, people leaving 1 Timothy 1:5-6 "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" for "fruitless discussion" (NASB) were off-focus from "godly living" and from anything Jesus Christ said "words" about, and were focused on promoting their own thoughts in the Lord's church.¹ⁿ That has been a problem since the New Testament-era.

Many people treat disagreement with them on what they think the Lord wants taught as disagreement with the Lord Himself. This is not right; Ecclesiastes 5:2 says "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth" (JPS 1917). None of us mortals is the Lord. Romans 11:33b-4a says "how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (ASV). **No mortals should dare presume that a disagreement with them over a disputed matter is a dispute directly against the Lord, because no mortal is the Lord. No mortals should dare presume that a 'failure' to agree with them is disobedience to the Lord, because no mortal is the Lord.**

A common idea is 'Given our position and experience, we are sure that the Lord wants this taught or done, and those who do not follow our teaching disobey the Lord.' A related common idea is 'From what we have inferred from Scripture, we are sure that the Lord wants this taught or done, and those who do not follow our teaching disobey the Lord.' In either case, or any case similar to them, the 'what the Lord wants taught or done' came from human surmising. Hence, any such case results in treating teachings of mortals as teachings of God. We should not do that.

A very famous character in Scripture placed himself equal to God. That character boasted at Isaiah 14:12-5 "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). That famous Bible character is Satan, who found himself ejected from Heaven and doomed eternally. Inasmuch as any people treat their teachings about 'what God wants' as teachings of God Himself, they do a low-key replica of Satan's sin. Mortals must make a distinction between their teachings and the Lord's teachings.

Jesus reproved religious leaders' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. The same has happened in the church. Some of this "tradition of men" in the church are the famous masses of religious precepts foreign to Scripture. Other "tradition of men" is 'expected inferences' on Scripture that are passed on, and which are passed on as 'indisputably true.' When group leaders press 'expected inferences' of Scripture, and refuse to accept the possibility of mistake by predecessors on these, they do what Jesus reproved. These views of mortal predecessors are taught as indisputable divine truths. Regardless of the groups' terminologies, this is exactly what Jesus reproved.²

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to "Give diligence" in order to be "handling aright the word of truth" (ASV). 2 Timothy 3:16a describes Scripture as so: "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV). Because "Scripture is breathed out by God," God actively produced Scripture. Because Scripture was produced by God, it would therefore be "word of truth." Therefore, to handle Scripture rightly, it takes a hard effort. The written Word of God is inerrant, but words of mortals about it are not. Treating rejection of inferences of Scripture as rejection of Scripture itself is treating our inferences as Scripture; it has the same effect as adding those inferences into the text. Revelation 22:18 forbids us to "add unto" (ASV) Scripture. We cannot treat our inferences of Scripture as Scripture itself. Again, Scripture is God's written Word, and we are not God.

In the church, we must avoid prideful thinking³ⁿ that our ideas about 'how to please God' are divine truths. Rather, let us see God's thoughts to be God's thoughts, and our ideas not.

Bad Attitude #2 of 2: Treating Goodness as Expendable

Jesus reproved religious leaders' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. The "tradition of men"

¹ In some cases, precepts become objects of religious servitude. Some groups have made promoting such precepts a core part of their mission. This approaches idolatry.

² Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People, page 12.

³ Also, if someone's favorite things about group meetings include self-congratulation over their 'rightness' and gloating of others' 'wrongness,' s/he should beware of pride.

referred to in Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9 was from the Pharisees, whose prominent work was a mass of guidelines for following the Law,¹ which was the first five books of Scripture. This gave the core of Judaism. The Law was already long and complex enough, but Jewish priests of Jesus' time had added masses of complex and elaborate interpretations of it, and all Jews were expected to be bound by those added masses of interpretations.

The command to rest from labor on the Sabbath is in Exodus 20. By Jesus' time, that command was interpreted to limit even recreational activity, brief household tasks, travel, and nearly any other expenditure of effort.

We now turn to the situation of Mark 3:1-6. Behold this story of Jesus Christ:

"And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there who had his hand withered. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man that had his hand withered, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and his hand was restored. And the Pharisees went out, and straightway with the Herodians took counsel against him, how they might destroy him" [ASV].

Here, the Pharisees were opposed to a healing on the Sabbath! To them, it was too much like work. They were so concerned about 'proper respect' for their interpretations of Scripture that they were angry a good deed was done. As far as they were concerned, good deeds were expendable compared to 'proper respect' for their inferences of Scripture.

Titus 3:8b instructs "that those who have |believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds"² - exactly of the type Jesus Christ preached. Good deeds are a high priority.

In the church, too many people have withheld expressions of goodwill from persons who disagree with them about 'how to please the Lord.' Similar to the Pharisees of Mark 3:1-6, they are more concerned about 'proper respect' for their ideas on 'how to please the Lord' than they are about treating people as they should. Such people are more concerned about being agreed-with on 'how to please the Lord' than they are about treating rightly even His followers.

It gets worse. Some people do bad deeds toward those who disagree with them about 'how to please the Lord.' They are so sure that their 'how to please the Lord' ideas are divine truths that they presume to seek out and 'punish' those who disagree. Rather than be Jesus Christ's servants, they promote themselves to 'Christ's little helper' to 'keep charge over His servants.' This is unauthorized.

At Matthew 23:8 Jesus Christ said "One is your Teacher,| and all ye are brethren" (NASB|ASV), and at Matthew 23:10 He said "Neither be ye called masters: for |you have only one Master, the Christ" (ASV|NCV) None of us is to be 'Christ's little helper' keeping charge above His servants. Matthew 24:48-51 in a parable that Jesus Christ spoke has this warning: "if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants and eat and drink with the drunken" (ASV), then he would be punished. This "evil servant" during his master's physical absence presumed for himself a position to "beat" other servants, and forsook what he himself was supposed to be doing. Many people do similar among the church.

We should not value religious precepts so much that we withhold good deeds because of them. We should not feel ourselves in a position to maltreat people because of religious precepts.

Putting These Together

These attitudes have prompted church people to think they are so much 'better' than some Christians that there is good cause to divide. One rationale is 'being in a league above,' and another rationale is 'punishing the wayward by dissociation.' Regardless of rationale, these attitudes should not be causing divisions in the church, because their very existence should be opposed in the church.

¹ NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

² ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952.

An Unholy Quartet of Biblically-Associated Sins

Let us discuss two characters in Scripture who had problems with pride, with lying, and with slander – and one of whom also had a problem with factiousness. There are lessons to be learned.

We start with Satan. Isaiah 14:12-15 reports that Satan boasted within himself "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). Satan's pride got him ejected from Heaven and doomed to eternity in Hell. He had two other defining traits:

- Revelation 12:9-10 calls him "the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night" (ASV)
- Jesus said of him at John 8:44 "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (NASB).

These two additional traits are that he likes to make accusations, and he likes to lie.

We now turn to Diotrefes, a person who led even to a rebellion against one of Jesus Christ's Personally-commissioned apostles. John wrote at 3 John verse 9 "I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to |have the pre-eminence among them|, does not accept our authority" (TNIV|ABUV|NBV). 3 John verse 10 has "he refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church" (TNIV). Here we see a man who was operating by this rule: 'If you are not in the group that gives me preeminence, you are not welcome here, and if you are among my group but welcome other believers, you are not welcome here either.'

3 John verse 10 has some detail about Diotrefes's pride and factiousness: it went beyond this to "unjustly accusing us with wicked words" (NASB). Verse 11 urges Gaius "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (ASV). John called Diotrefes's pride, slander, lying and factiousness what it was: "evil."

Pride, lying, and slander were in two Bible characters infamous for rebellion against the Lord's authority. For the Bible character in flesh among the church, there was this fourth sin: factiousness.

In highly-factious church groups and church-related groups, it is common for group influencers to tell harmful lies to facilitate their agendas. It is common to hear/read accusations of 'wayward members' that are not true. It is common to hear/read accusations of other groups that are not true. This is not 'exposing their errors' and calling the other groups 'wrong.' What this is: claims that other groups have religious tenets and practices that they do not really have. Further, the perpetrators are entirely unconcerned about whether or not the accusations are false. If someone shows the allegations inaccurate, the perpetrators will more likely revile the informant¹ⁿ than change.

Within these highly-factious groups, substantial portions of adherents either approve of these happenings or are unconcerned about them. Rather than be bothered that such wickedness is occurring in 'church business,' they often honor those who do this wickedness as 'taking a stand for the truth.'²ⁿ To honor such wickedness under any guise is a serious wrong.

Revelation 22:15 warns that "every one that loveth and maketh a lie" (ASV) will be excluded from Heaven. Scripture closely associates pride, factiousness, slander and lying. Church people should beware that indulging in the sin of factiousness invites its three toxic companion sins.

¹ The most common bases upon which factious lying accusers revile those who 'dare' to correct their false accusations are that

- 1) the person simply opposes biblical truth,
- 2) the person is an 'undercover agent' of the slandered group.

Of course, a person who just does not like to see the wickedness of false accusation really has no such motives. However, factious lying accusers care little to nothing for what is right or wrong when it comes to their factious interests.

² The most common tactics to excuse willing false accusation seem to be:

- 1) 'I am simply preaching the truth from the Scriptures,'
- 2) 'S/he is just taking a forceful stand for the truth from the Scriptures.'

Both of these ways have been effective ways for liars and false accusers to avoid the issue of their sin. Of course, accurate statements about Scripture do not make false accusations of people true. Of course, being 'right' does not mean that we can do what Scripture teaches against. There is no 'rightness exemption' in Scripture.

Problems with Understanding Scripture

Misunderstanding #1 of 7: 'Not Dividing Implies Approval'

Many church people view a refusal to divide against others as an indication of approval of others' precepts. Such a teaching is not taught in Scripture, and actually Scripture speaks against it. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians about their participation in idol temple meals, and were not rebuked for that issue in itself. We start at 1 Corinthians 8:1-6 with what the empirical truth is:

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know; but if any man loveth God, the same is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" [ASV|NASB].

Here, it is shown that empirically, no idol has reality. Eating food sacrificed to idols has no religious reality either. However, we now go to 1 Corinthians 8:7-11 about concern for other Christians:

"However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, when they eat it, they feel guilty. But food will not commend us to God: neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours cause those who are weak in faith to fall into sin. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food sacrificed to idols while thinking it is wrong to do so? And so by your knowledge this weak person is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. When you sin against your brothers and sisters in Christ like this and cause them to do what they feel is wrong, you are also sinning against Christ. So if the food I eat causes them to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again so that I will not cause any of them to sin" [ESV|NCV|ASV|NCV|NASB|ESV|NCV|ESV|NASB|NCV].

What we see is that Paul rebuked the Corinthians for being reckless with their liberty about eating food offered to idols at idol temples: their recklessness was causing "weak" Christians to do "what they feel is wrong." There is no rebuke of the activity in itself. We see no 'Do you not know that participation in idol temple meals shows an approval of idol worship?' No such text exists here or elsewhere in Scripture. Had presence at idol temple meals implied approval of idol worship, then we can be sure that Paul would have objected. He did not object, so presence at idol temple meals did not imply approval of idol worship.

Gatherings of Christians are not idol temple meals. Even if they do not agree, fellow Christians share a common target of religious service: Jesus Christ. Fact: Scripture does not teach that presence universally means approval.

Any opinion that presence universally means approval is a non-biblical opinion. In contrast, that Christians are to refrain from acts of dividing is an explicit directive of Scripture. Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, contrary to what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."¹ Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church. Non-biblical opinions do not provide a legitimate basis upon which to 'suspend' Scripture's commands against acts of dividing.

Misunderstanding #2 of 7: 'We Are Right, so It Is Okay'

Many church people have this mistaken belief that being 'right' makes a lot of things 'okay.' When it comes to dividing within the church and strife with other parts of the church, they assume that these acts too are 'okay' as long as the doers are 'right.' They assume that the Lord would be 'on their side.' The truth is that the Lord is never 'on our side' in the act of sinning.

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

To illustrate the wrongness of many people's views on division and strife within the church, we will use a school playground analogy.

One school year at Fictitious Elementary School, the normal playground monitor was Ms. Monitor. On the first day of school, Ms. Monitor told the students her playground rules before allowing them on the playground. One of those rules was that there never be any violence.

One day, some children asked Ms. Monitor if she preferred that the children not play two-hand touch football. Because such games can devolve into rougher football, she did indicate that she did prefer that students play other games.

On a later day, a two-hand touch football game ensued. Those children who had asked Ms. Monitor about her feelings regarding two-hand touch football told the players that they were disobeying Ms. Monitor by playing two-hand touch football. When the players replied that they were not disobeying Ms. Monitor by playing the game, the response was to try to interfere with the game. Ultimately, the interfering students resorted to hitting players.

Ms. Monitor put the students who had interfered with the game in a playground detention area for a week, while the two-hand touch football players continued to play. When the punished students objected that she told them she preferred everyone play a different game than two-hand touch football, she told them that they were right on that. She also told them that she did not make a rule against two-hand touch football, but she did have a rule that there not be any violence. She said they broke that rule, and their punishment was deserved.

As we can all see from this allegory, the offending students were absolutely right that Ms. Monitor preferred that students not play two-hand touch football. That did not mean that they could do anything they wanted when the subject became a reality.

Many people in the church behave similarly to the offenders of this allegory. If a matter of dispute comes up, they try to figure out what the Lord would prefer taught or done. Thus far there is no problem. However, once they think they have figured it out, they seek to get everyone else to see things their way, and act as if those not convinced are in sin against the Lord. They do this even if the Bible gives no indication that unconvinced people sin by being unconvinced.

Romans 16:17 condemns *διχοστασια* translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); *διχοστασια* is literally "standing apart"¹ and refers to dissociation. Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church even before that letter was written. To engage in acts of division in the church is sin.

In church division and strife over religious disagreement, those who are guilty assume that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'on their side' because they are 'right.' They assume that if they show themselves 'right,' then they show that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'on their side' in their actions. They are not correct. 'Rightness/wrongness' does not turn sins into non-sins. People being 'right' would not mean they can respond to 'wrongness' in ways the written Word of God prohibits.

The reality is that when church people seek to enact division in the church, showing themselves 'right' would not mean that their action is not sin. Their action would remain sin. Further, there is no way that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'on their side' as they do the sin.

Misunderstanding #3 of 7: Thinking Inference 'Trumps' Statement

Many church people have this mistaken belief that they can do different from what the Bible says based upon things that the Bible does not say. Now, there are many cases where a Scripture passage is most reasonably understood to be teaching something it does not explicitly say - but the passage still does not explicitly state it. There are many times that a Scripture passage is rightly understood to be teaching something - but the passage still does not explicitly state it. Scripture can teach something but still not explicitly state it. Even so, we not right to act contrary to what Scripture explicitly says for things which Scripture does not explicitly say.

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

There are times where someone initiates or proliferates division or factiousness in the church based upon inferences of Scripture. This is not to be done.

The following illustration will demonstrate the point to be made. While teaching, imagine that a mathematics instructor says "There are three apples and four bananas." A student tells a classmate "The teacher said that there are seven pieces of fruit." Now, the teacher's statement can reasonably be understood as saying that. Loosely speaking, s/he did say that. Strictly speaking, s/he did not. The teacher said the words that s/he said. If the disparity matters, the teacher can say "I did not say that; I said" and repeat the words s/he actually spoke, and be in the right.

Here is another illustration. Imagine that this same mathematics instructor says "Hay dos hombres y tres mujeres." A student tells a classmate "The teacher said 'There are two men and three women.'" The translation is entirely accurate. Loosely speaking, the teacher did say that. Strictly speaking, s/he did not. The teacher said the words that s/he said. If the teacher says "I did not say that; I said" and provides the words s/he actually spoke, s/he is in the right.

There are times when Scripture explicitly says something. There are times when what Scripture says can be rightly inferred as teaching something it does not explicitly say. Any such inferences cannot be given the same weight as explicit statements of Scripture - let alone greater weight. What Scripture explicitly says should not be 'trumped' by any inferences of Scripture.

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). Jesus Christ wants His followers united as "one" in serving Him.

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 for immediate audience. 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).

Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"² and refers to dissociation. Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church even before that letter was written. To engage in acts of division in the church is sin.

These are things Scripture explicitly says. Regardless of any inferences of Scripture, what Scripture explicitly tells us to do or not do must be preeminent. Regardless of any inferences of Scripture, explicit statements of Scripture against factiousness and to seek unity are to be followed.

Misunderstanding #4 of 7: 'It Is Not That Simple'

There are two passages that should be taken at face value, but which often are not:

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

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

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

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

³ "Law" is the first five books of Scripture. Regarding "factious man" (ASV), 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.

Greek translated "does not adhere to" at 1 Timothy 6:3-4 is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."¹ The problem with the disapproved teaching is merely that it is "different" from teaching about "godly life" and "words" of "our Lord Jesus Christ." Accuracy is irrelevant; if the teaching was off-topic from those subjects, it was disapproved-of. Titus 3:8-11 warns of "factious" people with "a morbid interest in disputes." The "law" = first five books of Scripture, and the "foolish questionings" were over Scripture and would have involved a lot of Scripture-backed statements. Still, the "foolish questionings" and "disputes" are "unprofitable" because they are irrelevant to

- 1) anything "our Lord Jesus Christ" spoke "words" about, which were mainly about:
 - a) how we should live our overall lives, and
 - b) His work and importance for our salvation,
- 2) "good deeds" and "godly life."

Factions have a tendency to press the views they are rallied around. Paul indicated that factions were not to form from differences in thought about 'peripheral' matters unrelated to those two subjects.

1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11 mean what they say. In the church, we often do not realize this.²ⁿ Many in the church focus on disputes over subjects irrelevant to

- 1) anything "our Lord Jesus Christ" is recorded speaking "words" about, which were mainly about:
 - a) how we should live our overall lives, and
 - b) His work and importance for our salvation,
- 2) "good deeds" and "godly life."

Per 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11, we should not be doing these things. It really is that simple.

In the church, people often think that the Scriptures here are 'not that simple,' or 'not that cut and dried.' 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."³

God gave Scripture so that His servants can know everything we need to know to do to please Him. Of all things Scripture addresses, it will be most thorough and clear about what we need to DO.

Therefore, when 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11 warn us not to fixate on nor factionalize over disputes which are irrelevant to

- 1) anything "our Lord Jesus Christ" is recorded speaking "words" about, which were mainly about:
 - a) how we should live our overall lives, and
 - b) His work and importance for our salvation,
- 2) "good deeds" and "godly life,"

they **mean simply and exactly what they say**. Let us act accordingly.

Misunderstanding #5 of 7: Not Distinguishing Christians from Otherwise

Many church people do not fully distinguish between Christians and non-Christians as they should. Jesus Christ said at Luke 12:51 "Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (ASV). Greek translated "division" here 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. There is division between the church and the world.

The church and the world are separate entities. A lot of church people do not recognize that, and treat servants of Jesus Christ as if they are of the world. We will examine this statement by a unity-oriented writer of the Disciples of Christ and a response by a factious writer of the same fellowship from before the 1968 split:

¹ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

² This included me at one time.

³ ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

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.

"It should be a matter of just pride that our missionaries have been leaders in cooperative work with other church bodies. These consecrated workers have felt that since God was evidently cooperating with Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, they, too, should do so"¹

which the factious writer quoted and then responded

"We do not know on what ground the assumption of God's cooperation with the various denominations is made, but it is highly probable that the same evidences could be given to support the idea that God is cooperating with the Roman Catholics, the Mohammendans, and the Hindus."²

In passing, we note that the factious writer passed a pejorative judgment on something he admitted a lack of knowledge about. More importantly, we note that he did not make a distinction between "Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists" versus "Mohammendans and Hindus."³ⁿ

Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44⁴ and "believers" (NASB) in such places as at Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe the people in the church. Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. "Christians" = "disciples" in "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB) per Acts 11:26; Greek μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁵ A Christian is 'one who follows Christ's teachings.' A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings.⁶ⁿ

The world is an unholy thing. 1 John 2:16 has "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (ASV). James 1:27 says "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); Greek translated "religion" literally is "religious service,"⁷ so "pure religious service" involves to "keep oneself unspotted from the world." The world is an unholy thing.

Colossians 3:12 speaks to Christians "as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved" (NASB) – notice that "holy" is included. 1 Corinthians 3:17 has "the temple of God is holy, and such are ye" (ASV); the people of the church are "holy."

1 Corinthians 6:11 says to Christians "you were washed, you were | made holy" (ESV|NCV), and Acts 10:15 says "What God hath cleansed, |you must not consider |unholy" (ASV|NASB|NBV). To consider Christians to be the same as the unholy unbelieving world is to do just such a thing.

A distinction must be made between any Christians and the unbelieving world. Christians are not to have the division among themselves that they have with the unbelieving world.

Misunderstanding #6 of 7: Non-Christian Hunts

Jesus Christ was preaching a sermon about regular life, and toward the end He went from talking about false prophets to talking about people in general, and says at Matthew 7:20-3

"Similarly, you will know people by the deeds they do. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. For many will say to me on that Day, 'Lord, Lord, |we spoke for you. And through you we forced out demons and did many miracles.' Then I will say to them clearly 'Get away from me, you who do evil. I never knew you'" (NBV|ICB).

This has gotten misunderstood to mean that we are to hunt for non-Christians in the church.

This passage tells us that we would know that non-Christians were such by the deeds they do in regular life. It does not tell us to do an inquiry if we do not know.

¹ Corey, Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy, page 165.

² Hayden, Fifty Years of Digression and Disturbance, page Twenty-one.

³ The misspelling is original to the printed document. Mohammedans are Muslims.

⁴ Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

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

⁶ We have no authority to call 'non-Christian' any person who fits the Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian." The Bible meaning of that term is to be accepted.

⁷ In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

Jesus Christ taught and explained the Parable of the Tares. It explains how trying to pull the unbelievers from the world could cause harm to believers. We head to Matthew 13:

Matthew 13:24b-30:

"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he saith, Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them" (ASV).

Matthew 13:37b-42:

"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil" (ASV).

The parable is about the world and believers, but the principle applies to other areas. Uprooting things implies forcible activity. Forceful activity to remove unbelievers from among believers can damage the latter too.

Such efforts happen. People presume for themselves the status of 'watchdogs' and make it their task to look for and identify 'non-Christians' in the church. These hunts are an unfortunate result of thinking Christians are defective because of opinions on distinctly-religious details and/or what happens during assembly – it can arise to deciding Christians are 'non-Christians' based on these things. We know this because it has happened.

Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44¹ and "believers" (NASB) in such places as at Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe the people in the church. "Christians" = "disciples" in "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB) per Acts 11:26; μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."² A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings.³ⁿ

We are not told to go hunting out non-Christians in the church. From the principle of the Parable of the Tares, we can see that such endeavors can inflict collateral damage on the church. We should not do such things. We also should not do what leads to it: attempts to judge quality of Christians in areas that Scripture does not appoint to us.

Misunderstanding #7 of 7: Failure to See Certain Sin as What It Is

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that begins "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, (ESV), has διχοστασια⁴ "standing apart"⁵ and ends "drunkenness, | orgies, and the like" (NASB|TNIV). This is a list of very carnal vices.

The church understands there is no way to treat "sexual immorality" or "impurity" or "idolatry" or "drunkenness" or "orgies" as 'okay.'⁶ⁿ As of c. 2000, there are church congregations and church-related groups who stand against "sexual immorality" and "drunkenness," and rightly so – and from the same pulpits proudly say they 'will not fellowship with' groups that will not come to agree with them on favorite group religious precepts. They are against those other sins, as they ought to be – but as for another sin of the same class, they heartily endorse it!

The fact is that διχοστασια "standing apart" is classed with those other sins. Many in the church need to treat διχοστασια "standing apart" in the same ways as those other sins.

¹ Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

² Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

³ We have no authority to call 'non-Christian' any person who fits the Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian." The Bible meaning of that term is to be accepted.

⁴ Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

⁵ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

⁶ The church would devolve into moral debauchery if these sins were treated the same as many treat factiousness. 'What they are doing is causing a temptation to me' would be considered an acceptable reason to indulge -- with disastrous results.

An Example of Factiousness Made to Look Good

Topic #1 of 2: The Example

Many church people engage in factiousness while portraying it as a good thing. We consider one widespread example here: closed membership. Closed membership prohibits full status in a congregation to Christians not rightly baptized.¹ⁿ It ranges from trivial withholding of privileges to automatic refusal to acknowledge Christian status at all. Regardless of reason, closed membership is refusal to fully accept unbaptized Christians, and thereby creation of an exclusivist faction.²ⁿ

To be sure, it is important that Christians be baptized. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said "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" (NASB|NCV). First, Christ told us to baptize "disciples." Second, Jesus Christ expects His followers to be baptized in His Name just as He expects them to obey Him. If a person knows rightly about water baptism, yet has a resistant attitude toward water baptism itself,³ⁿ then s/he has the same attitude toward obeying Jesus Christ. It would not be fitting to 'baptize' such persons, as they are not Christians.

As true as this is, it is equally true that not all unbaptized Christians are non-Christians. Not all unbaptized Christians are resistant against baptism; some are hindered from baptism by such things as ignorance, mistake, or circumstances. We must handle this reality biblically.

¹ James O'Kelley/O'Kelly, a Restoration leader, referred to closed membership as so: "the door to that Church is water"* -- a true observation. Acts 2:47 examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved" (ASV|NASB). The Lord is Door and Doorman to the church. Biblically, we come to water after coming to Him.

*James O'Kelley "Plan of Christian Union" quoted in its entirety:
MacClenny, The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly, page 248.

² A clear illustration of this is from 1957 in the Restoration group in Australia, the Churches of Christ. Differences exist with their U.S. counterparts; one of these is that even 50 years later U.S. Churches of Christ did not normally acknowledge unbaptized Christians and often discouraged adherents from doing so. As we discussed in *Part 6/A Lesson from History*, the Restoration began in the U.S., and it called for no creed beyond Scripture. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?' and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."* Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ. While recognising sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."*

Clearly, a Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was more than the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally there were acknowledged Christians who, while accepted by Jesus Christ into His church, were rejected by mortals from membership in congregations thereof for not adopting favored group precepts. The attitude is 'The Lord might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as 'inadequate,' and was brazen exclusivist factiousness.

* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, pages 81, 155.

³ Care should be taken before someone who resists being baptized is assumed resistant to baptism itself. Personal experience recalls someone who was not baptized for eight years only because the congregation required public baptism and s/he was shy. Others have resisted baptism fearing potential negative consequences. This is not to say that such reasons are okay, but to point out that not everyone who resists being baptized is resistant against baptism itself.

Scripture explains proper baptism. 1 Peter 3:20-1 refers to "water"¹ and relates baptism to it as "figure | doth now save you, even baptism, | not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a | clear conscience" (BishB|ASV|NASB|RSV 1952); baptism represents "an appeal to God for a clear conscience," which is the repentance within conversion. Greek transliterated "baptize/baptism" means "dip,"² "make overwhelmed,"³ "immerse,"⁴ "completely submerge."⁵ This is assumed common to Christians at Romans 6:2-11 where we are pictured buried as dead and resurrected up as we are baptized in water and raised. Christian baptism extended the conversion baptisms of ancient Judaism, where converts immersed themselves.⁶ In Scripture, "baptize" requires immersion of a convert. Any water procedure not applied to a convert and not involving immersion is not baptism.

Not all Christians know this fully. Many Christians hold baptism very highly, and yet are not baptized. Many think a water ceremony they had before conversion, or a pouring or sprinkling ceremony they had, was baptism - or at least enough of a baptism that they would sin via `rebaptism.'⁷ⁿ It is wrong, but it is a reality; that reality must be dealt with biblically.

We have to recall who a Christian is. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) to describe the church at Acts 2:44.⁸ Scripture uses "believers" (NASB) for servants of Christ in such places as Acts 2:47+5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2; Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁹ A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings; if a person meets the Bible meaning of "Christian," s/he is a Christian.¹⁰ⁿ

In Matthew 28:19-20a Jesus said "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" (NASB|NCV). We are to "make disciples" and "Baptize them," meaning we are to "baptize" "disciples." Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). If we are to follow this directive rightly, we must acknowledge that converts we baptize are already Christians.

Some people do not fully accept the implications of this¹¹ⁿ or accept this at all. One person claimed wrongly of the Restoration movement "it has sought to inclose within the fellowship those who desired to be united with Christ in terms of His will, and at this point, Christian immersion enters the picture."¹² The earliest congregations of the Restoration movement did open membership¹³ and many congregations refused to change from this.¹⁴ Still, after enough congregations adopted the change from open membership, closed membership became perceived as the norm - as the quoted author shows. Then, faithfulness to Jesus Christ came to be judged by baptism. For instance:

¹ Noticed from "Baptism, which is symbolized by that water" (ISV).

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

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

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

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

⁶ Chronological Study Bible, page 1099.

⁷ Romans 14:23 has "Anything that is done without believing it is right is a sin" (NCV). Pushing baptism on people who think their baptisms would be sin pushes them to sin.

⁸ Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

⁹ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

¹⁰ Scripture gives no permission to call `unbeliever' or `non-Christian' any person who fits the Bible meaning of "Christian."

¹¹ The Book of Acts meticulously records Christian baptism, and none for Apollos. The example of Apollos at Acts 18:24-8 shows that Christian baptism was not a must-have for acceptance by the church. This does not negate a Christian's duty to be baptized, but biblically, baptism as a Christian is not a must-have for acceptance by the church.

¹² Ford, A History of the Restoration Plea, page 170. The oddly-spelled word is original to the text.

¹³ DeGroot, New Possibilities for Disciples and Independents, pages 34-5.

¹⁴ Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, pages 119 and 120.

"Again, Mr. Corey presents open membership in the most favorable terms imaginable. Why should he still deny his own approval of it, except that such approval is still in disfavor in the majority of churches? How, moreover, is one to 'recognize' a Christian except by his obedience to Christ's command? If personal devotion and moral character are to be the only tests, then the church must accept a terrible responsibility for judging of personal matters."

No mistake: the primary criteria for whether or not to recognize Christians is not their service to Jesus Christ, but the immersion criteria "his obedience to Christ's command" – as if Christ really had only one.¹ⁿ The author of that text shows not the slightest concern that many unbaptized Christians think they are baptized, and think they have followed that one of Christ's directives. The proposed excuse for making this one criteria preeminent is unbiblical: a congregation need not do any "judging" when a Christian moves from congregation to congregation in the Lord's church. Doing any "judging" of a Christian on the basis of one deed is far more risky than doing so on the many facets of overall life – assuming that a congregation's leadership insists on doing such presumptuous and unauthorized judging when a Christian moves from congregation to congregation in the Lord's church.

This brings us to a very important thing to be aware of: the church is the Lord's church. It is not 'our church.' At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). The word translated "church" in the New Testament is εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.² Before the event of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings"³ and is translated "followers" in the ICB. Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers. At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV) – that is "My church" meaning first-Person singular possessive: it is His church.

Scripture is clear as to Who the Ultimate Authority is over Jesus Christ's church. At Matthew 23:8 Jesus Christ said "One is your Teacher, | and all ye are brethren" (NASB|ASV). At Matthew 23:10 He said "Neither be ye called masters: for | you have only one Master, the Christ" (ASV|NCV). Per Jesus Christ, HE is the Person Who is the Ultimate Boss of His church. Not even His apostles could claim an authority equal to Him or even above other apostles.

The implications are strong. If a congregation is a congregation of the Lord's church, then it is in His church and falls under His jurisdiction. Scripture uses "believers" (NASB) for servants of Christ in such places as Acts 2:47+5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2; likewise, Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) for servants of Christ in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁴ A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) to describe who composes His church at Acts 2:44.⁵

¹ Strictly speaking, there is no record of Jesus Christ speaking any command to be baptized; He commanded us to baptize. Converts have a duty to be on the receiving end in that.

Nonetheless, a Christian who fails to be properly baptized has not disobeyed a recorded command of Jesus Christ; in many cases, s/he is a victim of someone disobeying the command of Jesus Christ. In such cases, s/he should not be treated as a guilty party.

² Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

³ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

⁴ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

⁵ Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

Once Jesus Christ admits a believer to His church, that Christian is in His church. Congregations of the Lord's church are in His church. If a person has fulfilled the condition set by Jesus Christ to be admitted into His church, then s/he has met the condition set by Jesus Christ for admission into any congregation of His church. Any congregation leadership should not presume to refuse acceptance of any person whom Jesus Christ has admitted to His church. Whether on the basis of proper baptism *or on any other criteria*, no matter how biblically-based, this is not to be done.¹ⁿ

¹ Having shown that baptism status of Christians is not an acceptable reason to divide in the church, I will show Bible facts about baptism and two sides of what should be done. At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge."^{*} Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

A common retort to justify improper modes of 'baptism' is along this line: "Do you think it makes any difference how much water is used? Why?"^{**} Answer: it does not matter what we think. The Greek used shows that we need to use enough water to do as Jesus Christ said. We are to do as Jesus Christ told us to do -- period.

However, not all Christians understand that correctly. One problem is that the English word used to translate the Greek has meanings incompatible with the Greek word. Even though "baptize" and "baptism" in English allow meanings outside what the Greek word means, the divine text used to express Jesus Christ's command is not in English, but in Greek: what the Greek means is what Jesus Christ commanded. Jesus Christ told us at Matthew 28:19 "completely submerge" "disciples" of Him.

Here is how the Christian Connexion in 1827 New England handled those not baptized: "`baptism is only one thing, viz., a burial in water; and that it is enjoined on believers only; that it is the duty of all believers to be baptized as soon as they are born again.'"^{^*} This accords with Scripture. The practice of "`the elders and brethren'"

"`they do not think a believer ought to be driven to submit to that command before he sees the duty, and do not think a brother should be shut out until he is baptized; but they consider their duty to instruct such in the way of the Lord more perfectly.'"^{^†}

This acknowledges that there is only one way to baptize: "burial in water" and those who have not had this are unbaptized. They are taught the truth about baptism, but not divided against if they fail to see their mistake. That is a good approach to the matter of unbaptized Christians; it promotes Bible truths but avoids factiousness.

On the other hand, here are some true statements expressed by a member of the Disciples of Christ, describing his group at that time:

"As to the form of baptism, we hold, in common with all other Christian bodies, that immersion is baptism. It is true that many others hold that sprinkling and pouring will do, but none dispute immersion. It passes for baptism among all denominations, so that in this they stand upon common and undisputed ground."[†]

This raises an important point: immersion is undisputed as valid baptism within the church, and to expand on that, immersion is the sole 'mode of baptism' that fits the Bible meaning of baptism. What is not baptism is disputed in the church, but what is valid baptism is stated in Scripture and undisputed within the church.

Many church groups that practice non-immersion water ceremonies call for church unity -- in the area of baptism, they need to do their part. *They* are using 'modes of baptism' that are out of harmony with Jesus Christ's directive and unacceptable to large portions of the church; rather than urge the larger church to accept 'modes of baptism' out of harmony with Jesus Christ's directive, *they* should amend their practice. If they want sprinkling or pouring involved in baptism, these activities can accompany proper baptism ceremonies; if they wish to have a sprinkling/pouring ritual for infants, do so, but after they become converts, baptize them. Eliminating baptism substitutes which discord with Jesus Christ's directive and which cause unbaptized Christians to stay unbaptized can greatly mitigate church division.

* Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 391.

** My Church: An Adventure in Christian Fellowship, page 89.

^* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, page 81 then 155.

^† Quoted in Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 91.

† H. T. Morrison article in Sweeney, New Testament Christianity, pages 2:187-8.

Topic #2 of 2: The Lesson of the Example

As we just studied, there are people who make baptism in water a pretense upon which to divide within the church. We will study in Scripture where baptism should motivate unity.

Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" is NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,¹ found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The letter was initially a general letter to "the saints" in all church congregations. "Ephesians" 3:21-4:6 says:

"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. one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (NBV|NLT 1996|ASV).

In ancient times, baptism was considered an initiation rite that identified already-done conversion²ⁿ; in Christianity, unlike among other ancient religions, all Christians had/have only one prescribed initiation rite,³ⁿ which is baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. This passage "Ephesians" 3:21-4:6 shows we are to glorify Christ by "making allowances for each other's" real or alleged "faults" because we are all "one body" who ultimately identify of "one faith" to serve "one Lord" Jesus Christ.

As we can see from this passage of Scripture, the common "one baptism" appointed to all Christians was used to point Christians to be "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (ASV). Church people have insisted that Christians should divide on the basis of baptism in water; such persons misuse baptism in ways totally contrary to how the Lord intended it.

The excuse gets made 'If those other people would just get baptized rightly, then the cause for division would not exist.' The real cause for the division is the people who initiate the act of dividing.

This passage has a list of things that should remind Christians to be "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (ASV). The list includes three things church people have misused as 'good reasons' to initiate division in the church: the Lord, the Holy Spirit,⁴ⁿ and baptism in water. Things which Scripture says should unite the church are not valid bases to divide it.

Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"⁵ and refers to dissociation. Christians had been taught against such conduct even before this epistle was written.

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). Many times in history, people have proposed 'good' reasons to divide within the church - even up to things Scripture expressly says should unite us. Any time we suspect we have a 'good' basis to divide the church, we should learn from this, and reject the notion.

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

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.

³ Ephesians 3:3-9 refers to "mystery" (ASV) in Christianity. Mystery religions were about an entity who had overcome death,* as Christ did. The competing ancient popular mystery religion Mithraism had multiple levels of initiation.** All involved water and each represented rank.^* It is evident that in Ephesians, Christianity was being compared favorably against Mithraism and similar rival religions.

* 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, pages 276-7.

⁴ In Scripture, tongues are a gift of the Holy Spirit. As of c. 2000, some Pentecostals do not acknowledge Christians who not practice modern speaking in tongues.

⁵ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

The Effects of Factionalism

After Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He said at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations | . Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). The "everything I have taught you" shows that He was instructing His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*.

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' | doctrine | and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (ESV| KJV, NKJV| ESV). We can be sure that "the apostles' doctrine" was exactly what Jesus Christ called for at Matthew 28:19-20 "teach them to obey everything I have taught you" (NCV). Paul was an apostle, and he wrote at 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].

From these two passages, we see that the New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." We can find the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

Luke 11:23b is the end of a discourse about Jesus Christ regarding casting out demons after He had cast one out. At Luke 11:17-23 we read:

"But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and | he who does not gather with Me scatters" [ASV|NBV].

We note that this passage is primarily about Jesus' reply to an accusation that He cast out demons in service of Satan – but there are interesting things regarding His choice of words. One interesting thing to notice is how He starts this reply by discussing "a house divided" (ASV) and ends "he who does not gather with Me scatters" (NBV).

Within this discourse, Jesus Christ had something to say about division and people serving Him. This applies to His church: if we are not most interested in gathering people to Him, we will instead be scattering.

History is replete with groups that found one or more valid truths of Scripture, and went on crusades for them, and got stunted growth.¹ A case in point is the Restoration Movement in Canada. As we studied to start *Part 6*, the Restoration Movement led to the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches. In Canada, the Restoration Movement was at one time growing as fast as the Restoration Movement in the United States,² but was joined by many Scotch Baptists, who were very agreement-centered³; as of the late 1900's, Restoration groups in Canada had dwindled down to about 110 congregations due in part to internal fighting.⁴

A similar state of affairs happened in the United States among the Churches of Christ. In the mid-1900's, this argument-racked group was paying more attention to details of religious

¹ DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 7.

² Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 293.

³ Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 293.

⁴ Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 296.

precepts than to concerns of morals and ethics, and so many young people left the group that a whole generation was nearly missing from the group.¹ This is a second case where interest in arguments over religious precepts stunted church growth. These two cases are just within the Restoration Movement. We can be sure that the entirety of the church can provide more examples of where fighting for religious precepts within the church resulted in a group's growth stagnating.

We have been warned against this. Jesus Christ said at Luke 11:23b "he who does not gather with Me scatters" (NBV). Paul was an apostle, and he wrote at 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 New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." We can find the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the four gospels and Acts 20:35. We are not to advocate "a different doctrine" that is irrelevant to the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life" - we are to "adhere to" these latter two things.

However, what we are not to do has happened, and it explains a lot of what has happened in the church. When church people decide that they are

- 1) more interested in getting people to adopt religious precepts unrelated to "sound words" "of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life,"
- 2) less interested in the "sound words" of "Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life,"

they are not primarily interested in gathering people to Jesus Christ. They are more interested in seeing people gathered to their religious precepts unrelated to 1 Timothy 6:3-4a "sound words" "of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Their priorities for gathering differ from those of Jesus Christ, Who is more interested in seeing people gathered to Himself. Therefore, they are not gathering with Him. The result: they scatter.

The nature of the church as of c. 2000 shows the legacy of this. There are church groups whose leaders and main influencers lead the church groups to stay antagonistic toward other church groups. There are church groups that formed because they needed to escape interference from leaders of an older church group. Some church groups have leaders and main influencers who may not engage in open hostility to outside groups, but certainly lead the church groups to stay aloof from other church groups. We have other church groups who have no desire to stay aloof from other church groups, but nonetheless their members have far more to do with each other than to members of other church groups. The c. 2000 church has sinful divisions and it also has separations.

It is a legacy of people whose gathering priorities were gathering people to religious precepts unrelated to 1 Timothy 6:3-4a "sound words" "of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Jesus Christ said at Luke 11:23b "he who does not gather with Me scatters" (NBV).

Major Misplaced Priority that Has Led to Factiousness

What Christians disagree over is mostly things that affect only a handful of hours on the weekends when church groups assemble themselves together. As far as how to

- 1) value Jesus Christ and
- 2) conduct ourselves throughout the week,

Christians are in overwhelming unanimity of thought. Unbelievers who do not study the church generally cannot distinguish among Christians.

What makes Christians different from other Christians is overwhelmingly within the handful of hours per week that we assemble with our church groups. Unfortunately, those differences have often been made a basis for acts of division within the church.

¹ Hughes, Roberts, The Churches of Christ, page 145.

After Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He said at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). The "everything I have taught you" shows that He was instructing His followers to perpetuate what He had taught up to that time. Paul was an apostle, and he wrote at 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).

From these two passages, we see that the New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." We can find the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the four gospels and Acts 20:35. Some of those "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" can be found 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). Jesus Christ wants His followers united as "one" in serving Him.

At 1 Timothy 6:3-4a Paul spoke sharply about anyone who "does not adhere to | sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to |a godly life" (NBV|NASB|NLT 1996). Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."¹ Those who were being castigated were not staying near to the approved subjects.

Matters that are relevant only to church assembly do not fit the 1 Timothy 6:3-4a "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NASB) or "the doctrine conforming to |a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Jesus Christ had very little to say about activity at church meetings, and a handful of hours per week is not remotely all the time that we are alive. Even at 10 hours per week of assembly, this is still less than 6% of the 168 hours in a calendar week.

Scripture is God's written Word. It is also capable of telling us everything that we need to know in order to please God. 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.**"²

Let us be clear: Scripture was written by God Himself, and He wrote it so that His servants can know everything they need to know to do to please Him. There is no true flaw or shortcoming in it.

Scripture has little to say about the events of church meetings. This means that God in His written Word had little to say about the events of church meetings. Fact: there is not enough information in Scripture to reconstruct, without any human conjecture and/or 'fill in the gap,' even one congregation meeting in its entirety from start to finish.

If any person was to try to take just one congregation, and select one single meeting thereof, and try to reconstruct it in its entirety from start to finish without using any imagination, conjecture, or surmising, s/he would fail. The Scriptures do not provide even remotely that much information about any single meeting at any single congregation. The events of church meetings were given scant attention by God in His written Word.

It follows that matters relevant only at congregation meetings do not rise to the importance of a legitimate basis upon which to divide the Lord's church. A dying prayer does take a high priority: Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "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). That is of higher importance than the affairs of congregation meetings.

¹ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

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

A Trio of Positive Examples from History and Their Lessons

Positive Example #1: The Christian Connexion

The Restoration Movement's larger body led to the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches. There was a smaller body which was older, and identified by various names: the Christian Church, the Christian Connection, the Christian Connexion, and the General Convention of the Christian Church were among them.

It was a convergence of several groups that began in the late 1700's and opening of the 1800's. It was led by Elias Smith and James O'Kelley¹ and Abner Jones.² One of the groups that eventually converged was about half of Barton Stone's group that did not merge with Alexander Campbell's group³ forming the larger Restoration body. The reasons for that arise from the differences between the larger Restoration body and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion.

One of the largest concerns for the non-merging portion of B. Stone's group was conceded to be valid by B. Stone: A. Campbell's group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."⁴ In that culture "religion" would have been synonymous with Christian life. The Christian Connection, in contrast with A. Campbell's group,⁵ had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality.

The Christian Church sought to emulate the first century church.⁶ They were resolutely biblical,⁷ uncompromising in New Testament faith,⁸ and insisted on cooperation among believers regardless of differences in thought.⁹ They distrusted uniformity.¹⁰ Uniformity of belief was not expected and not wanted.¹¹ One reason for this: "genuine religion can breath freely only in an atmosphere of freedom."¹² They wanted to free common people from creeds¹³ whether written or not. Elias Smith called for the liberty which the newly-born United States enjoyed politically to arise in the church religiously.¹⁴ Further, a consensus was that without any creed-like statement guiding Scripture inference, the Scriptures would be better understood and used more.¹⁵

Individual freedom in inference of Scripture was encouraged.¹⁶ An 1850's effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: "This," as one held up a Bible, "is what we believe."¹⁷

¹ Hughes, Reviving the Ancient Faith, page 115.

² Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, page 190.

³ Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, page 190.

⁴ West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

⁵ Alexander Campbell did not share the factiousness common in the group he led. People in his group took his ideas, and made them a basis for being factious. His life was complicated by altercations with people who went farther than he approved.

Bible-based unity-seeking survives in the Restoration as of c.2000 in the congregations of the Disciples of Christ. Many of the organizational agencies outside the congregations abandoned focusing on Jesus Christ's priorities for His church in the mid-1900's, preferring left-wing political radicalism, but many congregations remain focused on being church congregations.

Many Christians in the Disciples of Christ continue to believe the Bible. Accordingly, they believe in seeking non-factious cooperation with church congregations regardless of differences in religious details. There are congregations and individual Christians who have been doing this for decades.

⁶ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 63.

⁷ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

⁸ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 48.

⁹ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

¹⁰ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 48.

¹¹ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 63.

¹² Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 63.

¹³ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 50.

¹⁴ Elias Smith 1808 article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, pages 30-1.

¹⁵ Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, pages 46-7.

¹⁶ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 36.

¹⁷ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 34.

The Christian Church/Connexion devised this list of "Five Cardinal Principles" in 1866:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, our only Creed or Confession of Faith.
4. Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of fellowship and church-membership.
5. The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all."¹

The Christian Church²ⁿ insisted on "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as quoted above and related to that, the necessity of toleration and cooperation among Christians who had differences in thought.³ As stated before, an 1850's effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: "'This,'" as one held up a Bible, "'is what we believe'"⁴ – a right sentiment to have.⁵ⁿ

The Christian Connexion accepted plurality of thought, but not plurality of lifestyle.⁶ The Christian Connexion associated the word "Christian" with ethics rather than "doctrine," and had piety and morals as definers of the church.⁷ An "obedient Christian" could not be made by assenting to a confession, creed, or similar statement if the person was not imitating Jesus Christ.⁸ In this Restoration body, how the Christian lived was of primary importance.⁹ⁿ

It is evident that the Christian Connection could not safely merge into the larger Restoration body. The larger group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."¹⁰ The Christian Connection had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality. Rather, it insisted upon "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as one of its Cardinal Principles.¹¹ The Restoration was a staunchly Bible-believing movement, but the

¹ W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

² The reader may notice similarities between the Christian Connection and what this study advocates. I came to these views before knowing of the Christian Connection.

³ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

⁴ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 34.

⁵ It would be great if all church people who insist on accepting differing thoughts within the church would staunchly insist that God's Book is to be believed.

A premise frequently asserted by detractors of God's Book is that believing the Bible prevents unity in the church. History shows this false.

Truth: believing God's Book and accepting differences in religious thought among Christians is very doable. As of c. 2000 there are Christians in the Disciples of Christ who do that, and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion did that.

The Lord's cause would be greatly benefited if church people who insist on acceptance of differing views on religious details among Christians would staunchly insist that the God's Book is to be believed in its every detail.

⁶ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 37.

⁷ Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 35.

⁸ Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 64.

⁹ That is a contrast with the factious Restoration groups even as of c. 2000. It is all too common for a person who routinely behaves in ways inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings to be well accepted because s/he promotes the group's precepts.

If a person brazenly behaves in ways that show no following of Jesus Christ, but aggressively promotes group precepts, the conduct is viewed as unproblematic because 'S/he promotes the truth.' S/he is viewed as 'faithful' because s/he promotes 'the truth.' If anyone mentions how the person's conduct was inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings, the reply is 'Well, s/he was speaking the truth.'

In such groups, a person is made 'faithful' by ascribing to a group of precepts even if s/he has no use for the ways of Jesus Christ. This is in stark contrast to the view in the Christian Church. In the Christian Church, a person would have been faithful only if s/he was living according to Jesus Christ's teachings, regardless of what thoughts s/he had.

¹⁰ West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

¹¹ W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

approach to handling Scripture was different between these two groups.¹ⁿ As large portions of the larger Restoration body would insist on its "unwritten `theory of notions'" being subscribed to in order to fully accept the Christians in the Christian Connection, it was best that the Christian Connection not join it, as being unity-oriented does not mean entering unwise mergers. The Christian Connexion believed the Bible, accepted difference in thought otherwise, and made Christian life primary in judging Christian quality.

¹ An example of the differences is in how the two Restoration groups handled Christians misled about baptism. We will discuss Scripture's teachings about baptism, then discuss the larger Restoration body and the Christian Connexion.

At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge."** Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

A common retort to justify improper modes of `baptism' is along this line: "Do you think it makes any difference how much water is used? Why?"** Answer: it does not matter what we think. The Greek used shows that we need to use enough water to do as Jesus Christ said. We are to do as Jesus Christ told us to do -- period.

However, not all Christians understand that correctly. One problem is that the English word used to translate the Greek has meanings incompatible with the Greek word. The two Restoration bodies handled unbaptized Christians differently.

Many in the larger Restoration body have refused to acknowledge unbaptized Christians as Christians at all, but a more reasonable example of the larger Restoration body comes from 1957 in Australia. The Churches of Christ there differ some with U.S. Churches of Christ, but both come from the larger Restoration body. Closed membership limits church membership to those properly baptized. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question `Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?' and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."** Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ. While recognising sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."**

A Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was beyond the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally they directed this attitude to acknowledged Christians: `Christ might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as `inadequate,' and brazen exclusivist factiousness.

In contrast, here is how the Christian Church in 1827 New England handled those not properly baptized: "`baptism is only one thing, viz., a burial in water; and that it is enjoined on believers only; that it is the duty of all believers to be baptized as soon as they are born again.'""* This accords with Scripture. The practice of "`the elders and brethren'": "`they do not think a believer ought to be driven to submit to that command before he sees the duty, and do not think a brother should be shut out until he is baptized; but they consider their duty to instruct such in the way of the Lord more perfectly.'""[†] This acknowledges that there is only one way to baptize: "burial in water" so those who have not received this are not baptized. They are taught the truth regarding baptism, but are not divided against if they continue in their mistake. That is a good approach to the matter of unbaptized Christians; it promotes Bible truths, but avoids factiousness.

* Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 391.

** My Church: An Adventure in Christian Fellowship, page 89.

[†] E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, page 81 then 155.

[†] Quoted in Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 91.

Barton Stone was a leader in both groups. When about half of B. Stone's group did not merge with A. Campbell's group, it left about half that did. Shortly after that merge, adherents of A. Campbell's group began asserting their views on those who had merged with them.¹

The merge was not wise for anyone wishing for Christian unity. Barton Stone found that out too late. Late in life, Barton Stone sat in his own congregation weeping as exclusionist messages were preached from his former pulpit against Christians who had been sprinkled² rather than properly baptized. B. Stone saw too late that the merge made him seem to approve of a narrow factionism,³ and he came to be portrayed as someone favorable to that cause.⁴ The cause of real church unity suffered too. Factionists in A. Campbell's group got an opening to recruit protégés from a group that was unity-seeking.⁵ⁿ The Restoration body that became the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches grew hordes of factionists that were destructive to it and other church groups. Overrun by factionists led to fewer unity-seeking Christians than could have been.

Still, the overruns by factionists did not overtake the whole larger Restoration body. There remained portions of the larger Restoration body that were not pervaded by factiousness. As of c. 2000, that describes many Christians and congregations within the Disciples of Christ. Despite mischaracterizations by many Disciples affiliates,⁶ⁿ there are many Christians in the Disciples of Christ who continue to believe the Bible in most details or in all details. They seek harmonious cooperation with Christians of any church group even if they do not agree on religious precepts. This state of affairs was threatened in Restoration history, but it persisted and is in lasting shape.

The Christian Connexion remained unfettered by factiousness. From its beginnings, the Christian Connexion held all Christians to be one regardless of differences in religious thought.⁷ The movement centered on advocating a broad fellowship of Christians.⁸ An 1874 *Manifesto* held unity to be mainly a matter of Christian spirit and character, not of "doctrine" or polity which was held impossible, in contrast to the only unity that was held possible, which was unity from love and forbearance which Christians should have.⁹ Unity with outside church groups had already been a basis for the Christian Church's venture.¹⁰ It included in its "mission" something worded as so: "to give a true fraternity to all Christians of all denominations."¹¹

The General Convention of the Christian Church no longer exists. It merged with Congregationalists to form the Congregational Christians in 1931.¹² Throughout its 130+ year life, it demonstrated that unity can exist without uniformity of thought.¹³ⁿ While the Disciples of Christ struggled with factiousness, the portion of the 1800's Christian Connection that merged with them did contribute their tolerance of differing thought and wide fellowship parameters.¹⁴ The Disciples of Christ, as a body of congregations, did recover the original unity emphasis of the Restoration.

¹ Morill, [History of the Christian Denomination in America](#), pages 304-5.

² J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, [The Centennial of Religious Journalism](#), page 272.

³ J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, [The Centennial of Religious Journalism](#), page 272.

⁴ J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, [The Centennial of Religious Journalism](#), page 273.

⁵ Merging groups is not necessarily a good idea. Organizational mergers are not necessary for biblical unity, and do not automatically facilitate it.

⁶ People in agencies that exist outside of congregational authority often make claims about "the position of the Disciples of Christ" which typically are not remotely so.

⁷ Fagley, [The Congregational Christian Churches Part 1](#), page 79.

⁸ Bennett, [The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine](#), page 47.

⁹ Gunneman, [The Shaping of the United Church of Christ](#), page 165.

¹⁰ Gunneman, [The Shaping of the United Church of Christ](#), page 163.

¹¹ Dayton Christian Ministerial Association in Barrett, [The Centennial of Religious Journalism](#), page 29.

¹² Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, [Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement](#), pages 190-1.

¹³ In Canada, this legacy became part of the United Church of Canada.*

* Hunter, [The Congregational Christian Churches Part 2](#), page 42.

¹⁴ Bennett, [The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine](#), page 48.

Positive Examples #2 and 3: Two Denominations

We will study two denominations that no longer exist as of c. 2000.¹ⁿ They are the

- 1) Congregational Christians, a merge of the
 - a) Congregational Churches of the United States, and
 - b) General Convention of the Christian Church,² also called the Christian Connexion,
- 2) Evangelical and Reformed Church, a merge of the
 - a) Evangelical Synod of North America, and
 - b) Reformed Church of the United States.³

These two denominations were formed from two effective mergers which can be closely replicated by the whole church. What these mergers involved: uniting without entanglement.

In the case of the Congregational Christians, the merging denominations' affiliated societies maintained their corporate identities.⁴ The congregations were organized into voluntary fellowships with neighboring congregations, and a General Council coordinated voluntary national efforts.⁵

In the case of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, they adopted in 1932 a Plan of Union involving 12 articles of how the newly-merged denomination would operate.⁶ In 1940 they adopted a constitution, but even before then they had an effective merger, as each denomination's congregations and agencies continued under their original constitutions and bylaws, and also the Plan of Union.⁷

As far as conformity of religious agreement, the Evangelical and Reformed Church was stricter. The standards for ministers, members, and congregations were the Heidelberg Catechism, Luther's Catechism, and the Augsburg Catechism, and where these differed, the person was free to choose the view expressed in one of these, with the final norm being Scripture.⁸ Naturally, this approach would yield disagreements, and this was to happen. The Evangelical and Reformed Church's relationship to other church groups was to be unity-seeking and peaceful.⁹ In the Congregational Christians, there was no creedal statement, and most congregations had considerable differences in religious thought within them, and even greater from congregation to congregation.¹⁰

There is some good lessons to be learned from this. Both denominations, when they merged older denominations, simply had their agencies continue to exist. In their merger, they operated according to a common standard, but still had their agencies continue to exist as before. In their mergers, they did not haggle over getting these agencies reorganized before enacting their union.

The church would do well to learn from this. Many plans for unity are plans for union, and involve much wasteful haggling that is not necessary. What happens all too often in efforts for union is entanglement. We need to accept that unity is not synonymous with union.

Our denominations can continue to exist separately. However, as a replacement for a Plan of Union, we can let the Scriptures take that role. Where we disagree over its teachings, we can adopt the approach of allowing each other to disagree but still serve the Lord together.

¹ These two denominations merged in 1957 into the ill-fated United Church of Christ. From the mergers to the 1950's both church groups increased in members,* but this has not happened in the UCC. UCC congregations are autonomous, but Bible-skepticism and other forms of liberalism have infested the denomination's structures of leadership. From 1990-2005 UCC attendance dropped from 667,809 to 495,284** -- a drop of over 25%.

* Articles in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of...*, pages 288-9, 402-3.

** D. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, page 54.

² Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:288.

³ Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

⁴ Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:288.

⁵ Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:288.

⁶ Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

⁷ Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

⁸ Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

⁹ Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ...*, page 1:402.

¹⁰ Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ...*, page 1:288.

Lessons of the Church Acting in Unity

Lesson #1 of 2: The Canadian and American Frontiers

To lay the background, we review two passages we will be alluding to. 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 congregations is "to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" and to be "encouraging one another" in these. As long as a Christians meet for that purpose, they do as Hebrews 10:24-5 says. Jesus Christ said at Matthew 28:19-20a "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" (NASB|NCV). We are to go out and teach people to follow Jesus Christ and His teachings.

In the early 1900's, western Canada was sparsely populated. Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists were often unable to maintain distinct congregations, and therefore did Union congregations; this eventually led to the United Church of Canada.¹ Merging denominations is in itself indifferent to biblical unity, so here is the point: Christians are commanded to assemble per Hebrews 10:24-5, and by doing Union congregations, those Christians were able to assemble.

Frontier needs prompted efforts fitting biblical unity in the 1800's United States. Like in Canada during the early 1900's, throughout the 1800's the west in the United States was also sparsely populated by Christians. Christians are commanded to assemble per Hebrews 10:24-5, and at times on the United States frontier, even Protestants and Catholics were cooperating in ministrations.² Without these cooperative efforts, many Christians on the American frontier would not have been able to follow Hebrews 10:24-5 and assemble together to serve the Lord.

Before there was a western American frontier, there was an eastern American frontier. At Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, there was a camp meeting where Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists got together and preached.³ Military personnel estimated 20,000-30,000 attendees at the event.⁴ As many as five preachers preached simultaneously in various sites on the meeting grounds, and this meeting and others like it were reported to have changed the moral character of Kentucky and Tennessee.⁵ This and similar revivals in the pre-1861 United States prompted a spirit of unity.⁶ When Christian groups work together to urge people to live godly lives for Christ, as He ordained at Matthew 28:19-20,⁷ⁿ it unites those church groups because they are doing their appointed and right common task. As we just discussed, the moral character of two states was changed by such efforts.

Needs on the Canadian and American frontiers prompted local cooperative efforts to enable Christians to do what cannot be done individually. Christians there recognized how similar they were when they needed each other; even Christians of groups with relatively many disagreements were serving together. These Christians overlooked these overall minor differences to do together what could not be done individually. Because of such acting in unity, they were able to do Hebrews 10:24-5 among themselves - and by so doing, they did a chunk of Matthew 28:19-20 beyond themselves, and expanded church influence for Christ from coast to coast in two big countries.

¹ in Matlins, Magida, How to Be a Perfect Stranger, page 353.

² A. Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, page 66.

³ Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

⁴ B. W. Stone, Rogers, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself, with..., page 37.

⁵ Vos, Exploring Church History, page 135.

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

⁷ It is not right for factious church groups to hope for revival at 'their place' when they are unwilling to have the Lord's stated priorities be their priorities. Often, the desire is for the growth of the faction, and/or faction 'bragging rights.' When such hopes for 'revival' are made prayer, the factionists "ask amiss" (ASV) -- James 4:1-3. The Lord's priorities need to be their priorities.

Lesson #2 of 2: Third World Evangelism

We can learn some things from what is happening in other parts of the world in the decades surrounding 2000. At John 17:20-1a, Jesus prayed while enduring His death experience "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). Jesus Christ said at Matthew 28:19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (NASB). We are to be united as one, and seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Spiritism and Spiritism + nominal Catholicism¹ⁿ have been common religions in the southern part of the Third World. In 1930 Brazil, Pentecostals²ⁿ had only 267 places of worship, but by the end of the 1900's, Pentecostals composed between 10% and 20% of the entire Brazilian population.³ In just Third World countries, Pentecostal groups had 150 million people among them as of 1999.⁴ Pentecostalism began 1901 in Topeka, Kansas⁵ and burst out at the 1906 Azusa Street Revival. Within a century, out of the world population of around six billion people, Third World Pentecostals were over 2% of the world's population.⁶ⁿ Third World Pentecostals are winning great numbers to Christ.

At a symposium on Pentecostalism with leaders from Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal groups in 1965 Brazil, Pentecostals noted that Pentecostal evangelism must include these qualities: "It does not confine itself to soul-saving" and "It can only be effective in an ecumenical context."⁷ Church groups rally around efforts to help people with day-to-day needs.⁸ Pentecostal groups do not agree with each other or with non-Pentecostal Christian groups, but still work with other Christian groups in benevolence evangelism matching Matthew 5:16 "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (ASV). Growth numbers of Third World Pentecostals testify to the merits of doing the Lord's work *the ways He told us to do it.*⁹ⁿ

Whom Church Is About – A Lesson from Modern Growth

Per Acts 11:26, Christians were originally called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). At Matthew 16, Jesus was talking with His disciples, and we pick up at Matthew 16:15-8

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

¹ Mixing Catholic elements into other religions is common in Latin America.* Even if Spiritists identify as Christians, they are not Christians -- they are Spiritists.

* Molloy, Experiencing the World's Religions, page 371.

² The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is an oft-used target that charlatans abuse for personal gain. However, not all within this movement are such -- including leaders.

North American Pentecostalism with its glitz threatens to pass off such glitz as an ideal norm, which financially-struggling Third World places can ill-afford financially to emulate.* It would be best if many wealthier Pentecostals would exhibit the Christian quality of self-restraint in the area of extravagance.

It is important to note that many Pentecostals find the excesses of radical Pentecostals embarrassing.** The excesses should not characterize all Pentecostals.

* D. J. Garrard article in Burgess, Van Der Maas, New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, page 276.

** Tracy, Ingersol, What is a Nazarene, page 150.

³ Shaull, Cesar, Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches, page 8.

⁴ Shaull, Cesar, Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches, pages 11, 233.

⁵ Synan, The Century of the Holy Spirit, page 3.

⁶ This is more than some major world religions. In mid-1999, Judaism, Shintoism, Jainism, and Confucianism each had under 15 million -- World Almanac...2001, page 692.

⁷ Hollenweger, The Pentecostals, page 101.

⁸ Shaull, Cesar, Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches, page 101.

⁹ When Brethren evangelism's focus went from benevolence to gospel meetings, they had fewer results -- N. Smith, Roots, Renewal, and the Brethren, page 90.

It is commonly known that "Peter" is a transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.¹ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "small stone" and πέτρα means "foundation boulder."² Jesus said He would "build My church" (NBV) on the πέτρα, what was just said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (NBV). This is the premise upon which the church is built: that truth that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God.³ⁿ Greek translated "church" is εκκλησια; in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly to discuss the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁴ Jesus Christ ordained His church as a community of His followers, and members thereof would follow His teachings.

After His death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ 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*. Jesus Christ expected His followers to follow and perpetuate what He had taught in all four gospels and Acts 20:35.

At Matthew 28:19-20, Christ told His apostles to "teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" and they did that. Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' | doctrine" (ESV|KJV, NKJV). The "apostles' doctrine" would have simply been what Christ preached and taught during His earthly ministry. The apostle Paul showed this when he reported at 1 Corinthians 4:17 "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV) - he alluded to this at Acts 20:35. These "principles of behavior in Christ" would have been what Christ is documented teaching in all four gospels. These things composed "the apostles' doctrine" which was taught "everywhere in every church."

Now, as for other subjects, those within Christ's church were expected to have differences in religious thought. Paul wrote in Romans 14:1-13a

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that people who composed the church had - and were expected to continue to have - differing beliefs on religious details unrelated to Christ's teachings.

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

² MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

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

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

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

Still, Paul insisted that Jesus Christ's teachings have 'center stage' in the church, and he knew that there was harmful desire to delve off into unrelated areas. He stated at 1 Timothy 1:5 that "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB). At 1 Timothy 6:3-4a he warned

"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).

If anyone pushes "different doctrine" which "does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life" then s/he "is conceited and understands nothing." Greek under "does not adhere to" is negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."¹ **The problem with the teaching is just that it is "different";** non-contradiction and accuracy/inaccuracy are irrelevant. **What we teach should not stray from the subject of godly overall life nor from the "words" of Jesus Christ.** The doctrine we teach should not delve off into areas that He is not documented speaking on²ⁿ; the doctrine we teach should focus on what He actually spoke.

The New Testament Gospels: The gospels were not written for historical curiosity. They were written so that Christians could know what Jesus Christ taught in "words" of Jesus Christ.

Many church groups and related groups claim their focus is on Jesus Christ - but often, their overall real focus is this: what they think or 'infer' Christ's will is in matters He is not documented saying anything about.³ⁿ This focus is on their own teachings⁴ⁿ and is unbecoming the Lord's church.⁵ⁿ

The 1880-1910 United States shows what can happen when the church focuses on Jesus Christ. A group of new denominations that focus on Jesus Christ formed which includes the Evangelical Covenant Church and Evangelical Free Church.⁶ These two denominations are in a set of denominations which is the fastest growing in the U.S.⁷ as the 21st century opens.⁸ⁿ Other than Bible belief, these two denominations have minimal amounts of other distinctive insisted-on beliefs.

This parallels the New Testament, which show the church growing rapidly while it biblically accepted difference of thought and while it kept its focus on Jesus Christ. Quite unsurprisingly, operating church congregations and church groups in Bible ways has encountered Bible results. ■

¹ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

² Sadly, many factionists expect others to go with them into such delving. People who wish to simply be Christians get lowly-regarded as 'half-hearted' or 'less mature spiritually.' Some get treated as 'unfaithful.' It is wrong that Christians who are fixated just on Christ's teachings are often given little place by church people.

³ If any such subject truly affected Christian quality, surely Christ would have said something about it, and surely His divinely-guided secretaries would have recorded it.

⁴ Sadly, many such groups claim they are 'just Christians' and draw people who want to be just Christians. However, they expect people to 'grow' to adopt additional tenets. For any Christian who does not adopt such additional tenets, they not only think s/he is wrong, but they also view that Christian as 'less than what s/he ought to be.'

⁵ This is exactly what Jesus reproved with "in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Matthew 15:6-9.

⁶ D. Olson, The American Church in Crisis, pages 187, 236.

⁷ D. Olson, The American Church in Crisis, pages 102.

⁸ The Barna Group around c. 2000 researched and found: unbelievers in the United States commonly view Christians as not representative of Jesus.* I did not need the research for me to know this; I already knew this from some of the things I have known unbelievers to say and write as their reasons to reject the church.

The fact this note refers to especially relates to what one minister who extensively interviewed unbelievers reports: for unbelievers to be more open to the church, they want the church to teach about Jesus more.** This is supposed to be His church, and it is disgraceful that this has become the case.

* Kinnaman, Lyons, unchristian, page 15 -- unconventional grammar original.

** Kimball, They Like Jesus but Not the Church, page 228.