

Part 7: What Should We Do?

Our Denominations and the One Church

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

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

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

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

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To ancient Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word⁴ⁿ is: in ancient Greek culture, it was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁵ This parallels how Christians are followers of Christ. "Christians" renames "disciples" per Acts 11:26b "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" also translated "followers" (ICB) is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁶ Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers. Colossians 1:18a says of Christ "And he is the head of the body, the church" (ASV). Acts 5:14 examples how "believers" were "added to the Lord" (ASV) then as now. About the church, Acts 2:47 reports that the Lord Himself is "adding to | them day by day" (NASB | ASV) each newly-saved convert.

There is only one church. That one church is built on one foundational precept: that Jesus is the Christ-Messiah and Son of God. The Lord builds that one church by adding individual believers of that one foundational premise to it. There is no other foundational precept upon which the church is built. Every believer of the one foundational precept⁷ⁿ gets added by the Lord to the one church.

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

² MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

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

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

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

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

⁶ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

⁷ Some people have added their own precepts about 'how to serve Christ' upon which they think the whole church should stand -- in effect, they add to the foundation hoping to make it suit them. They think that if others do not adopt their precepts, then those other people are 'less than fully in the church' -- in effect subtracting them. The church is the Lord's; mortals should not act like they share ownership in the foundation-laying process, nor try to subtract any person whom the Lord has added.

Romans 14:1-13 expects Christian religious disagreement.¹ⁿ Christians will always disagree on religious tenets and on worship practices. Denominations exist due to this and will continue to exist related to this. Some of these denominations will be more right than others in various matters.

It is our choice whether or not denominations become divisions and/or oppositional factional 'religious parties' like political parties of politics. A denomination is not always a faction-division; some denominations are simply associations of congregations.²ⁿ The congregations in our various denominations can see work that needs to be done to serve the Lord, and can decide to do as much of it together as we can as fellow servants of the Lord and *members of His family*.

When we accept the Gospel by biblical faith, we are adopted into Jesus Christ's family. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,³ which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This letter was originally to "the saints." In the general epistle now titled "Ephesians," Paul wrote about God the Father at modern verse 1:5a "having foreordained us unto adoption as [his own children] through Jesus Christ" (ASV|ICB|ASV). All Christians are adopted by God because of Jesus Christ. In describing Jesus Christ, Hebrews 2:10b-11 says "So God made perfect the One who leads people to salvation. He made Jesus a perfect Savior through Jesus' suffering. Jesus, who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his [brethren]" (ICB|ASV). Christians are saved through the Gospel by means of biblical faith in Jesus Christ; when thus saved they compose *ONE FAMILY* and are all fully accepted as family by Jesus Christ.

What are some truths of this family? Galatians 6:10 says "So then, as we have opportunity, [let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith]" (ASV|NASB).⁴ⁿ What did Jesus say about household strife? At Mark 3:24-5 Jesus said "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (ASV). If we fight against each other within the church, we do an action that hurts all of us, and are promoting a state that Jesus Christ spoke negatively of.

The word translated "church" in the New Testament is εκκλησια. Its readers would have been Greek-reading Christians who also used the Greek Septuagint Old Testament translation for Scripture, so we will discuss two usages. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁵ Per Acts 11:26, "Christians" renames "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is rendered "followers" in the ICB here. Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. In this context, the Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers. As used in the Greek Old Testament Septuagint translation, εκκλησια translated a Hebrew word designating a "gathering" of Israel for a specific purpose or a "gathering" representative of all Israel.⁶ That Hebrew term also referred to the general gathering of God's people without any set purpose.⁷ It was

¹ If the church had handled disagreement then like later, several faction-denominations would have formed then. The passage told them -- and us -- to accept disagreement.

² Even if a denomination began as a faction, it need not disband if it is not factious. Also, if organizational mergers would be cumbersome, cooperative partnership with the rest of the church is all that is needed. Furthermore, in this model, there is nothing preventing a congregation from being in multiple associations.

³ Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

⁴ The word "especially" is not "only." The verse does not authorize Christians to do evil to non-Christians. The verse does not excuse partiality/favoritism, nor does the verse excuse Christians and congregations of Christians from doing good deeds toward non-Christians. The verse tells us to make a special effort to do what is good toward Christians. It also says "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people."

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

⁶ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 42 NT.

⁷ In Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 73.

used at Acts 7:38¹ to refer to Israel at Mount Sinai when Moses was delivering the Judaic Law: "the church in the wilderness" (ASV) also rendered "the assembly in the wilderness" (TNIV). When ancient Greek-reading/hearing Christians met the word in the Greek New Testament, use of ἐκκλησία regarding Christians would have placed them in the gathered mass of God's people.

The Old Testament ἐκκλησία had groups of Jews disagreeing with each other. There were Pharisees, Sadducees,² and other groups, but they were all still Jews and still the collective of God's people. As a Christian Jew, Paul remained a Pharisee per Acts 23:6 and Philippians 3:5; the Sadducees and Pharisees sat together on the "council" (ASV) per Acts 23:6, and Jesus noted the authority of the "council" (ASV) to judge true sin at Matthew 5:22. The Old Testament ἐκκλησία refers to the Jews as the collective mass of God's people, and the New Testament ἐκκλησία in this meaning describes the community of Jesus Christ's followers.³ⁿ We can be in groups that disagree and still be Christians.

Per Acts 2:47, **God** adds to **one** church all followers of Christ that **HE** redeems via the Gospel; our denominations are just a puny mortal matter -- *we are one church whether we accept it or not.*⁴ Mortals do **not** set boundaries of the 'one body' by choices of mutual 'fellowship' or rejection.⁵ⁿ

Before the event of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). The Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is translated "followers" in the ICB here. Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. Why do we congregate as churches? Let us behold Hebrews 10:24-5 again:

"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].⁶ⁿ

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds, and this purpose of encouraging in such matters is repeated after the directive to keep meeting. We are Christians who follow Jesus Christ doing the good deeds He preached, doing so motivated by biblical faith, and every so often we meet to encourage each other to do more of this in our regular lives. The feeding source of church congregations flows from our individual overall Christian lives, and not the reverse: Scripture never mentions church congregations as feeding source for Christian life. Too many Christians think the best qualities of their Christian lives are shown in what happens in their church congregations during meeting time, but this also is not a biblical notion.

Rather, church congregations should be an outflow of overall individual Christian lives; we are to live good overall Christian lives, and meet together with others to encourage more such efforts. Overall Christian lives of service to the Lord Jesus Christ are what is most important in the Lord's church; rather than congregation meeting sessions being feeding source for Christian life, individual Christian lives of biblical faith are the feeding source for individual congregations by bringing those individual Christian lives together.

Too many Christians think that the highest qualities of their Christian lives are what happens in their church congregation during meetings...

...but per Matthew 25:31-46, the Lord Jesus cares most about what we do in our overall regular lives...

...church meetings are few-hour gatherings of these lives.

¹ In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

² Pointed out by A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, page 77.

³ Many people think that what makes a religious group 'the Lord's church' is a set of precepts. Scripture never shows sets of precepts making the church -- people make it.

⁴ Idea from Jay Guin, web page <<http://oneinjesus.info/born-of-water/>>, February 2, 2007; document file <<http://jayguin.wordpress.com/files/2007/02/born-of-water-13-lesson-version.doc>> last paragraph.

⁵ In discussing relations between groups, we cannot presume to negotiate what **GOD** has already **made true**: **GOD** has **already** put **ALL** Christ's followers in **ONE** church - Acts 2:47.

⁶ Per this passage, pro's/con's of 'interdenominational proselytizing' should be weighed. If a Christian is not a *real* hindrance to others' **OVERALL** service, risking a crisis in faith that disillusions this Christian's service is a risk not worth taking. However, if a group hinders good works, we should proselytize out from it.

Church congregations do not make/sustain Christians. At Acts 8:26-39, when an Ethiopian official who "was returning" (ASV) converted, and after immediate baptism the Holy Spirit took the evangelist away, the Ethiopian official "went joyfully on his way" (NBV) back to Ethiopia away from all congregations. Church congregation has no relevance as to whether or not a person is a Christian.

The best quality of Christian life is not affairs of church meetings which s/he takes out; it is the Christian's overall service to the Christ motivated by biblical faith, which s/he lives at all times and brings to church assembly. The overall church, as we have studied in this essay, is the overall collective community of Jesus Christ's followers.

Things that would not have mattered had we not been directed to assemble should not be overriding themes of our overall Christian lives. Assembly is PART of Christian life.

Scripture guides our conduct in disagreement. Romans 12:18 says "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone" (NASB|TNIV) and Hebrews 12:14 has "Strive for peace with everyone" (ESV). The reader/hearer is responsible for making a strenuous effort for peace with everyone that s/he can.

Let us recall Romans 16:17 against "divisions" meaning διχόστασια "standing apart." Imagine that you and I are in the same assembling group. If another assembling group of Christ's followers worships in ways we disapprove or has religious tenets we disagree with, we are still to try to serve the Lord together with them "in the bond of peace" (ASV) per Ephesians 4:3. If we say 'You need to agree with us on this-or-that during your meetings before we will serve the Lord together with you,' it is *WE* who violated Romans 16:17. Now, imagine we have a high-production kitchen, they have much canned food, and a disaster occurs with people needing food; we contact this other group to request combining resources and prayer together for the best from the Lord in the situation. If their leaders refuse due to assembly-time 'doctrines,' they chose to act contrary to Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14a, Hebrews 10:24-5, Ephesians 4:2-3, and Romans 16:17, but we were obedient to all.

Titus 3:8b-9a says that Christians ought to "be careful to devote themselves to good works|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings," and 3:10-11 goes on to say of "a factious man" "such a one is perverted, and sinneth" (ESV|ASV). Trying to have an 'accurate faction'¹ⁿ *is still being factious.*²ⁿ

An 'accurate faction' is still a faction.

While not an ideal situation for the church, denominations exist and will continue to exist partly due to differing beliefs with varying accuracy on assembly-time 'doctrine'/practice.³ⁿ

¹ Many factious church people think they are 'correct' and so they are 'not in a denomination.' Regardless of chosen meaning of 'denomination,' they remain factious.

² Scripture knows nothing of being 'factious for the Lord.' That would match being 'a murderer for the Lord,' 'a thief for the Lord,' 'a liar for the Lord,' or otherwise 'sinful for the Lord.' Scripture tells us to avoid factiousness and gives no exception.

³ What if disagreement requires a split? At Acts 15:36-41, Paul and Barnabas disagreed on a missions-related endeavor. Per 15:39, "there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated" (NASB). Barnabas took Mark south to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas north into Syria. This was before 1 Corinthians was written,* but at 1 Corinthians 9:5-6 Paul lists both Barnabas and himself as equals in a list of Christian workers that includes "the other apostles" (ASV). Paul and Barnabas's disagreement+split did not stop Paul from honoring and treating Barnabas an esteemed peer and coworker.

We most certainly do not see any hint of antagonism or rivalry. We do not see Paul and Barnabas trying to go on as if the other does not exist, nor do we see them trying to press others to decide 'him or me,' nor do we see them trying to make and rally factions around themselves against each other, nor do we see them promoting themselves against each other, nor do we see them trying to 'one-up' each other, nor do we see them trying to undermine each other. Their disagreement led to a split, but it still did not result in disassociation, factionism, or strife.

The church would do well to note this example of how New Testament-era Christians handled disagreement and splits -- and then also apply the lessons.

* F. Smith, Daily Bible, pages 1520 and 1531.

Religious tenets do not make a church; people who are followers of Christ make a church.¹ⁿ Who is 'right' and 'wrong' during church meeting time is not an authorized reason for antagonism among Christians; Ephesians 4:2b tells us to be "making allowances for each other's faults" (NLT 1996). We should contend for the Christian faith when unbelievers oppose it, and contribute helpful input in areas of church disagreement, but we are not authorized to

1. Contend against each other as opposition within the Galatians 6:10b "household of the faith" (NASB) causing the disapproved condition of Mark 3:25b "if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (ASV). By God's power the church can, but this status is disapproved.
2. Violate Romans 16:17 against "divisions" meaning διχοστασια "standing apart"² by causing ourselves and others in the Lord's church to be dissociating from others within the Lord's church.

Recall the New Testament church precept recorded at 1 Corinthians 4:6b in the footer. Regardless of who is in a denomination or not, we decide if we misuse denominations as a basis for factiousness.

Is Unity the Merging of Denominations/'Fellowships'? Not necessarily. The New Testament-era church had unity without any formal organizational structure, and enacted it by simple fellowship of Christians.³

Lessons from Scripture about the Lord and Variety

When God first created the universe, there was diversity throughout creation, and God called it "good," when He made the rich variety of created things.⁴ His imagination did not cease with creation. Human beings have so many ways to be varied that no human being is not unique.⁵ Diversity was part of God's design from when Creation was new and "good,"⁶ in the words of Genesis 1:31 "very good" (JPS 1917).

Diversity was the plan in the New Testament church as well. We will start with a letter that was written to all Christians. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" is NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,⁷ 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. But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men. (Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) **And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ**" (NBV/NLT 1996/ASV).

There was a variety of gifts and roles for His people to fill in order to enable the church to fulfill its mission. There was definite variety in these roles – as intended. God appointed these differing roles. These various and differing roles were to serve the Lord together and in unity. The Lord appointed that people serve Him in different ways – and that they serve Him united and together.

¹ No matter how 'faithful' someone is among a Christian group in attendance and in agreement with group tenets, if s/he is unyielded to Christ and His prescribed ways, then s/he is not a Christian. No non-Christian is added to Christ's church.

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

³ Noted by Webb, In Search of Christian Unity, page 10.

⁴ Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, pages 101-2.

⁵ Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

⁶ Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

⁷ Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

1 Corinthians 12:5 says "there are diversities | of service, but the same Lord" (ASV | ESV) and 12:6 says there are varieties | of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all" (ASV | ESV). 1 Corinthians 12:13 says "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (ASV). Per Acts 2:47, the Lord is "adding to | them" (NASB | ASV) and does the baptizing in this sense. 1 Corinthians 12 describes the church as a body, and uses the human body to make some points; 12:14-25a says:

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body [ESV].

The Lord designed the body to have variety on purpose, and He intended the same for His church.

These passages tell us that we are to maintain unity despite that we are different. Those who had personal inclinations toward being evangelists or teachers or prophets or whatever were not to form divisions against the rest of the church. Despite the "diversities" unity was to be maintained.

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

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

As Jews who became Christians continued to worship personally as Jews per Acts 21:20-5, this passage includes a religious difference: Jew and non-Jew. These two groups within the church would have worshiped very differently. The passage reminds us of the Creator, Who ordained diversity in His creation, and tells us there was to be unity even between Jews and non-Jews within His church.

Sociologists have long recognized that different church groups serve the needs of different constituencies, accommodating the complexity of human beings.¹ They offer a variety of contexts for people to get to know the Lord,² and they offer a variety of contexts and priorities for serving Him.

The modern diversity in church groups parallels the New Testament diversity of roles for believers to serve the Lord in. Diversity among Jesus Christ's people and their service to Him was intended. Any notion that the way to serve the Lord involves uniformity is incompatible with Scripture: the Lord Himself set the church up so that He would be served in a variety of ways.

Each church group has areas of priority among them and which can be shared with the larger church - "treasures" so to speak.³ Some church groups focus on educating people in Scripture, some focus on benevolence, some focus on learning godly living, and so on. There is no reason to bicker over which priorities are 'best' because together these specialties can richly endow the church.

¹ Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

² Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

³ Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 103.

Scripture never tells congregations to have uniformity.¹ⁿ The Lord knew His church would reach around the earth and cross many centuries. As it involved more people, it would involve more variations among His creatively infinitely-varied people. As variations increased, it makes sense that to facilitate efficiency in corporate activity, groups of similar Christians should form in the church.

Church groups, also called denominations, need not be divisions and/or oppositional factional 'religious parties' like the political parties of secular politics. A denomination is not always a faction-division; some denominations are simply associations of congregations. The congregations in our various church groups can see work that needs to be done to serve the Lord, and can decide to do as much of it together as we can as fellow servants of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ said "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (ASV) at John 12:26. He referred to His followers as "servants" (ASV) at John 18:36. At John 17:20-1a, Jesus Christ 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). He did not say 'that they may all be the same' - He said "that they may all be "one" (ASV). Philippians 2:2 urges Christians to be "of one accord, of one mind" (ASV), and Greek translated "of one mind" (KJV) is translated with more clarity as "harmonious" (NASB) at 1 Peter 3:8. Let us be harmoniously united as we serve the Lord with our differences.

Handling Disagreement Biblically

We will consider two scenarios:

- 1) when disagreement does not require separate ways, as in Romans 14:1-13, and
- 2) when disagreement requires separate ways, as in Acts 15:36-41.

Scenario #1 of 2: When Disagreement Does Not Genuinely Affect Beyond the Individual

The first situation is when people simply disagree, but it does not affect activities of others in the church. Romans 14:1-13a says:

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that even in that early period, Christians did not agree with each other on religious views. Here is what Paul wrote to do about that: "let us no longer censure one another."

We can see that these disagreements were not 'just let go.' People were going beyond expressing disagreement,²ⁿ presuming to censure one another over these disagreements. We can assume that those involved thought both that their views were right, and that this was a legitimate basis for "censure" of others. God in His Word here did not gratify curiosity over which view was 'right.' Instead, He told them "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind," "each one of us will give an account of himself to God," and then told them what to DO: "let us no longer censure one another." In essence, He told them 'use your best judgment and do not get in conflict over this.'

¹ This does not justify 'blowing off' the wisdom of the Lord's Personally-commissioned apostles in how the church normally did things under their leadership.

² **Scripture does NOT suggest expressing 'S/he is wrong,' or 'They are wrong,' or 'You are wrong' is in itself wrong.**

In this case, the disagreements did not genuinely affect anything beyond the individual follower. In these disagreements, the Roman congregation was prohibited from διχοστασία "standing apart"¹ or "divisions" in the church: Romans 16:17b "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV). We are to know that each individual answers to the Lord, and refrain from censuring one another – let alone dividing. In the church, a common way to censure others over disagreement has been showing disapproval by dividing from them. The "let us no longer censure another" forbids that too.

Scenario #2 of 2: When Disagreement Requires Separate Ways

The second situation we will discuss is how to handle disagreement when it requires those involved to go their separate ways. At Acts 15:36-41 we see just such a situation. Paul and Barnabas disagreed over how to proceed with a missions-related endeavor. Per 15:39, "there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another" (NASB). They were both fully convinced to their own rightness, could not be persuaded by the other, and their views were mutually exclusive. To continue in missionary-related activity as they both wanted to do, they had to go separate ways.

They did just that. Scripture does not say that either of those two people did wrong in so doing. Barnabas took Mark south to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas north into Syria.

This was before 1 Corinthians was written, but at 1 Corinthians 9:5-6 Paul lists both Barnabas and himself as equals among a list of Christian workers that includes "the other apostles" (ASV). Paul and Barnabas's disagreement + split did not stop Paul from respecting Barnabas and from honoring and treating him as an esteemed peer and coworker.

We most certainly do not see any hint of antagonism or rivalry. We do not see Paul and Barnabas trying to go on as if the other does not exist, nor do we see them making people choose 'him or me,' nor do we see them trying to make and rally factions around themselves against each other, nor do we see them promoting themselves against each other, nor do we see them trying to 'one-up' each other, nor do we see them trying to undermine each other. Their disagreement led to a split, but it still did not result in disassociation, factionism, or strife.

That examples how to handle disagreement as Scripture teaches. Even if a split is necessary, we are not to let it escalate to antagonism, rivalry, 'unwarm' disassociation, factionism, or strife.

Here is one thing that the Bible has to say about διχοστασία "standing apart"² or "divisions" in the church: Romans 16:17b "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV). Disagreement is not to be expressed by "standing apart," meaning that disagreement is not to be expressed by active disassociation. Even if the disagreement leads to a separation, it is not to reach active disassociation.

The Principle of These Two Situations

These two situations tell us something very important. If difference in thought does not genuinely affect anything beyond the individual believer's life, the difference in thought was to be accepted without censure or division. If the disagreement required a separation, the disagreement was to be handled without factiousness or strife. Either way, religious disagreement was not an acceptable cause of factiousness. This principle of Scripture is timeless, and should be always applied: religious disagreement is not an acceptable cause for factiousness.

Follow Paul's Example in Difference of Thought

Before we continue, I remind everyone that I am a firm believer that 2 Timothy 3:16 should be believed when it says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV). Jesus Christ is translated at John 10:35b as saying "a Escritura não pode falhar" (ARA) = "the Scripture no/not <=> it-can fail."

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

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

Jesus at Christ John 10:35b is also translated more directly "as Escrituras Sagradas sempre dizem a verdade" (NTLH) = "the Scriptures Sacred always they-say the truth." Per Jesus Christ's teaching, here is the right way to view Scripture: 'If Scripture teaches it to be true, then it is true.'

It is evident that during the New Testament-era, women's roles in the church were an area where there was difference in thought.¹ⁿ Paul wrote at 1 Timothy 2:11-4

"Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being | deceived, fell into transgression" (ASV|NASB).

Here Paul indicates that it is his practice to not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. His mentioning of this hints that it was the practice of others to allow either one or both of these things. Evidently, Christians had difference in thought over whether or not it was appropriate to allow women to teach and/or to have authority over men.

Earlier in his ministry, Paul instructed Christians not to bind opinions over each other in areas where Christians had difference in religious thought. He wrote at Romans 14:1-13a:

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

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:34-8 in the 1769 King James Version is often cited against women doing much within the church. The 1611 KJV, which the 1769 KJV is a successor to, translated a Greek text that varied from the New Testament-era text, and the difference in Greek text effected translation.

The KJV has "your" because it followed a text that included *υμων*, when all surviving ancient manuscripts did not have that word.* This effects translation. In addition, knowledge of how Paul was writing has improved since 1611.

1 Corinthians 7:1 has "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to | have relations with a woman" (ESV|HCSB). Paul spent the rest of the letter addressing some things they had written to Paul.

1 Corinthians 14:34-8 was just such a thing. When the New Testament-era text is translated, it starts with a quote of the Corinthian writers:

"let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church" (ASV)

to which Paul replied "What?" (ASV) "What!" (KJV). He continued "was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone?" (ASV). "What" is in rebukes to the Corinthians at 1 Corinthians 6:5 and 11:22 (ASV) and here at 14:36 too.

Paul quoted something the Corinthians proposed, then he dismissed it with an exclamation, and reminded the Corinthian congregation that they did not deliver the Word of God to the church nor were they the sole recipients thereof. Those at Corinth who wrote to Paul thought they settled the difference in thought regarding women's participation. Paul rejected their proposal, and made clear it was not their place to claim to have resolved this churchwide difference of religious thought by themselves.

* Nestle, Aland, et al, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, page 466.

Here, Paul reminded his readers that everyone will have to give an account to God in areas where Christians had differences in thought, and not enforce them by "censure."

We now return to the New Testament-era difference in thought over women's roles in the church. 1 Timothy 2:11-4 says

"Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being | deceived, fell into transgression" [ASV|NASB].

We can immediately notice is that Paul gave a directive "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection." Then, he gave his practice in the area of women's roles in the church, and explained why from the Scriptures – but he gave no directive. Had Paul felt it was appropriate to give a directive on this matter, this was the time to do so – but he did not do so.

Christians can, and probably will, debate over how binding Paul's practice and explanation of his practice was meant to be. This essay is not meant to be about that. I will state that the Scripture here is 100% accurate about Paul's practice and rationale,¹ⁿ and go on to the main point.

This essay is to call attention to how Paul handled this difference in thought. Paul had his view and a rationale. Let us again review 1 Timothy 2:11-4

"Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being | deceived, fell into transgression" [ASV|NASB].

After giving one directive, Paul gives his practice in this area of difference in thought, gives a Scripture-based rationale – and gives no directive. Also, he does not give any criticism of those who were doing different from his practice.

In this difference of thought, Paul had a practice, and his rationale for it was based not just on his thinking, but was based on the very written Word of God. That is the very best basis for a rationale of one's own practice. Even though his rationale was based upon the written Word of God, he still gave no directive.

Paul, as an apostle, would have had every mortal authority to explicitly give a directive on this. He was not shy about giving directives he felt were merited, as he had just given one: "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection" (ASV). Yet when it came to this difference of thought, he gave his practice and a Scripture-based rationale for it – and stopped there.

This is an example to the church. During the writing of Scripture, which per 2 Timothy 3:16 is "breathed out by God" (ESV), Paul did not give a directive mandating his practice in an area that Christians had difference in thought over. He specified his practice, gave a Scripture-based rationale, and stopped there while writing this Scripture "breathed out by God."

Much division in the church has occurred because some church people took Scripture-backed positions in areas of disagreement and tried to press them onto the rest of the church. Usually, either the perpetrators divided against others to express disapproval, or victims were hostilely forced away. Had the church done as Paul did, many divisions that have happened would not have happened.

We have seen an area where Christians had difference in thought. Paul was commissioned by Jesus Christ Personally and had unequalled legitimate authority in the church, and Paul had his practice and a Scripture-based rationale for his practice. Even so, he stopped short of explicitly mandating his practice. He also refrained from suggesting that those whose practice was different from his were serving the Lord deficiently. To follow Paul's Scripturally-recorded example, when Christians have differences in religious thought, they may have their own beliefs which are even Scripture-based – but they should not press those onto the rest of the church.

¹ In 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Paul gave his own view where he had "no command from the Lord" (ESV). Scripture there was 100% accurate about Paul's thinking on that matter.

Paul was very clear about how far to take disagreements that are unrelated to certain subjects:

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"¹ⁿ
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."² 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. Paul warned of "factious" people with "a morbid interest in disputes." The "law" = first five books of Scripture, so these "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

- 3) 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,
- 4) "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.

Paul sought to live his life as an "example" (ASV) to believers, per Acts 20:35. Scripture gave us a glimpse of how Paul handled his own practice in an area that Christians had difference in thought over in a 'peripheral' matter. Paul had his practice in this area. Paul had a Scripture-based rationale for his practice. Even so, he stopped short of explicitly mandating his practice. He also refrained from suggesting that those doing otherwise were serving the Lord deficiently. In this difference of thought within the church, Paul followed his practice and informed others about it, but left others in the church to have their practices. This examples for us a Scripturally-sound way to avoid division during difference in thought. Let us follow his example.

Individual Responsibility

Romans 15:4 says "Everything that was written in the past | was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (ICB|NASB). This refers to the Old Testament; the New Testament-era church considered its lessons important.

God expects us to do right regardless of what other people do. Genesis 2-3 is an example of this. At Genesis 2:16-7 God said to Adam "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (JPS 1917). Adam was not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

After this, God made for Adam a wife. At Genesis 3, he disobeyed the one directive that Scripture reports that God gave him. Genesis 3:6 is placed beside the Tree of Knowledge; after Satan tempted his wife, the passage says "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (JPS 1917).

There were consequences to this, and none of them were good. When God confronted them over this, God asked for an account first from "the man" Adam. Genesis 3:12 records what happened next: "And the man said: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat'" (JPS 1917). His reply was to report influence from someone else for his wrongdoing.

¹ "Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.
² in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

After punishments were issued both to Satan and to Eve, God again turned His attention to Adam at Genesis 3:17-9 – this time to punish him also:

"And unto Adam He said: 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'" (JPS 1917).

In the entire account of Genesis 3:12-9, Adam's first answer was to assert that the woman enticed him to do it. It did not make Adam guiltless, and he was punished.

Although Adam was 'baited' by Eve's improper behavior, he was still expected to obey the Lord's command to him. The same goes for us.

Romans 14:1-13a clarifies that Christians are expected to not agree with each other in all matters. In the varying denominations/'fellowships'/'brotherhoods' of the Lord's church, there are things commonly done that not everyone agrees with or approves of. Some of these things are disparate from what is shown to be approved in the written Word of God. Nonetheless, whatever other Christians do is not an acceptable reason for us to do what we are commanded against.

Greek διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"¹ and is disapproved-of in church settings per 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). Galatians 5:19-21 lists "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that begins "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχοστασια,² and ends "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"³ meaning acts of dividing. Such activity is given disapproval in Scripture.

We will take account of two facts. First, in Adam's first sin, what another person did had no effect on his obligation to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge. Second, in John 21, a follower of Jesus Christ became unduly curious about another follower's doings. At John 21:22 Jesus Christ said to the asker "what is that| to you? You follow Me" (ASV|NBV); He told the asker that he should focus on his own following of Christ. Taken together, these two facts show that what other people do is not a valid reason for any Christian to do what God condemns in His written Word. Even if we do not approve of what other Christians do, we are still to refrain from engaging in acts of division.

Using Scripture Correctly -- 2 Timothy 2:15

2 Timothy 2:15 has "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (ASV). This would apply to Scripture; 2 Timothy 3:16a describes Scripture as so: "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV). Because "Scripture is breathed out by God," it means that God actively produced Scripture. Because Scripture was produced by God, it is His written Word, and would therefore be "word of truth."

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to "Give diligence" in order to be "handling aright the word of truth" (ASV). To handle Scripture rightly, it takes a hard effort.⁴ⁿ Scripture was produced by God, and God produced it for a purpose. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 describes Scripture with

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

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

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

⁴ This passage does not assure right handling of Scripture. Many mortals seem to think wrongly that if they use Scripture to promote religious tenets, they are incapable of error. 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.

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

Because all of Scripture is God's written Word, it is the highest Word on any subject it addresses.²ⁿ Scripture has good uses, but 2 Timothy 3:16-7 specifies the purpose for which God gave Scripture: "so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."³ⁿ

Scripture is accurate every time it speaks on any subject whatsoever, but it was not given as a comprehensive treatise on everything. It was given to make the Lord's servants "entirely instructed for all good work."⁴ⁿ It is a comprehensive treatise on "all good work," and that is its subject matter.⁵ⁿ

Allow a parallel: in study of mathematics, an algebra textbook is made to give a thorough study in algebra. It may accurately touch on business math, but a student would err trying to get a thorough study of business math from an algebra textbook. An algebra textbook may accurately touch on geometry, but an instructor cannot present an adequate geometry course just from it.

Many people mishandle Scripture similarly. Many times, they expect it to give a thorough rundown of subjects that are outside its subject matter. Many times, they use it for bad purposes.

There are some matters in which Scripture is not approved for use. Paul wrote 1 Timothy late in his ministry. 1 Timothy 1:3b-7a reports that Timothy was to

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

The problem was pride-motivated behavior. Jesus closes a list at Mark 7:21-3 "...pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within" (ASV); "pride" is self-exaltation and lack of humility. What Paul opposed in 1 Timothy 1:3-7 was ambitious people taking focus off "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" and focusing instead on "speculation" and "fruitless discussion" (NASB) aiming to inflate their statures as teachers. Paul opposed such conduct repeatedly:

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

Titus 3:8b-11 "I want you to insist on these things, so that they who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good deeds. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned"⁶ⁿ
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV)

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

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

² Part 5/Doctrine and Its Importance explains how "doctrine" is about overall living and about Jesus Christ Himself.

³ Hence, any twisting of Scripture to promote wicked deeds toward people is wrong. It is VERY perilous to abuse God's written Word to justify + promote such deeds.

⁴ Some use Ephesians 6:11-7 and Hebrews 4:12 about "the word of God" as a "sword" (ASV) to justify use of Scripture so as to assault other people with a weapon. No passage permits using Scripture 'assaultively' against people contrary to its purpose.

⁵ This passage does **NOT** say 'so that mortals can have every single religious curiosity of theirs fulfilled.' Just because some mortal might think 'It is important that we know this' does not mean that God would ever think so.

In Scripture, God provided us collectively everything we **need to know** -- NOT want to know. God has made clear what **HE** deems important, and all we need to know about it.

⁶ "Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.

Greek translated "factious man" at Titus 3:8-11 is translated "heretick" in the KJV. `Heresies' transliterates αἵρεσις plural for "party"¹/clique and "choosing."² This is someone so fixated on an "unprofitable" dispute that s/he seeks a religious faction/party rallied around a chosen opinion in that dispute. Again, an "unprofitable" dispute is one that is irrelevant to "good deeds" (NLT 1996, RSV 1952) called "good and profitable" (ASV). The "law" = first five books of Scripture; Paul disdained that **this behavior was even over Scripture itself**. Paul was concerned about this type of behavior even to the end of his life; in his final letter of Scripture awaiting martyrdom, he wrote at 2 Timothy 2:23 "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels" (NASB).

Scripture tells us at Titus 3:8-11 to stay away from "foolish questionings" (ASV) and other intellectual pursuits³ⁿ unrelated to 1 Timothy 1:5 "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB) or 1 Timothy 6:3 "words" (ASV) of Jesus and "godly life" (NLT 1996) or Titus 3:8 "good deeds" (NLT 1996, RSV 1952). People should NOT expect complete and thorough answers from Scripture for such intellectual pursuits; Scripture was not given to address them, and Scripture tells us to stay away from them. In fact, people should not even involve Scripture in any such intellectual pursuit if they intend to sin over it.

Christians were taught to focus on such values as 1 Timothy 1:5 "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB) and Titus 3:8 "be careful to devote themselves to good | deeds" (ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952). 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" with this purpose: "so that the | person who serves God | may be complete, | entirely instructed for all good work."⁴ To use Scripture as grounds for uncharitable activity toward people⁵ⁿ is to misuse Scripture in ways that are directly contrary to its purpose. To use Scripture as grounds for sin⁶ⁿ is to misuse Scripture in ways utterly contrary to God's appointed purpose.

Our carnal flesh seeks to lead us to sin. 2 Timothy 2:15 has "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (ASV). We should work hard to understand Scripture well - and to prevent ourselves from mishandling Scripture in ways that cater to our sinful tendencies. This includes our sinful tendencies to factiousness. We must strive to use Scripture solely in harmony with the purpose for which God provided it to us.

Priorities: A firm line on believing the Bible in its entirety is great.

However, the reason the Bible was given to us was to guide our behavior. It is very right to believe the whole Bible; it is even more important than right to do as it says - including its mandates to resist factious lusts.

¹ A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

² Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

³ This is not to prohibit simple religious curiosity. However, when a religious curiosity is made into a high and pressing priority, there is a problem. When a Christian makes this into a main expenditure of time and attention, s/he does wrong. When this is made a main expenditure of congregation time and attention, or a key part of church activity or mission, wrong is done. It is important that we avoid taking religious curiosities too far.

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

⁵ This is beyond just claiming that someone is wrong on something and giving reasons.

⁶ Humans are not inerrant. This does not change when they are examining the Bible or commenting on the Bible. Failure to realize this can cause and has caused big problems in the church.

Mortals often covet God's status, or `settle' for `God's little helper.' They act punitively toward any Christian they think `serves the Lord improperly' -- judged mainly/solely on if s/he agrees with their fallible inferences of Scripture.

Romans 14:4 warns "That servant's master decides whether he is a good or bad servant, not you" (PEB) -- a Christian's Master is the Lord. Some people need to stop promoting themselves to `God's little helper' and instead simply be His servants: they need to devote their attention to doing the priorities He appointed for all of us.

Scripture should certainly not be used to justify presumptions to an imagined and non-existent rightness exemption' to Scripture's directives for our conduct -- `rightness/wrongness' is irrelevant to these.

Learn from Attitudes Disapproved of in Scripture

In Scripture, we see some attitudes in Scripture that contribute to division in the church. We should learn from them.

We start with the Pharisees. The Pharisees' prominent work was meticulous examination of the Old Testament Law, devising of specific guidelines for following it in many possible situations, and passing those on as tradition.¹ The Old Testament Law was the first five books of Scripture.

As a group, the Pharisees were indifferent to goodness and also incredibly evil. In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus Christ healed a man with a disability on the Sabbath. The Pharisees decided that Exodus 20:10 prohibited virtually any effort at all on the Sabbath, and that included healing. Therefore, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (NASB) per Mark 3:1-6. They valued their inferences of Scripture so much that they considered good deeds expendable for them and were willing to murder for them.

Jesus Christ said at Matthew 23:23 that they "have left undone the weightier matters of the law | - being fair, showing mercy, and being loyal" (ASV | ICB). At Matthew 23:15 Jesus Christ said to them "you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (ESV). Their ultimate evil in Scripture was their role in the murder of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 26:59-61 they obtained perjury to make their murder of Him look like an execution. While doing this wickedness, they took great care to religious doings at John 18:28 and 19:31.

Jesus Christ reproved the Pharisees' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. This "tradition of men" was a mass of inferences of Scripture, and the problem was that they were treating their inferences of Scripture as divine truths. They were focusing their religious efforts to serving their inferences of Scripture and their ideas about how to serve God - but they were not serving God.

A similar attitude will appear among the New Testament-era church. We will discuss this when we get to Titus 3:8b-11 and 1 Timothy 1:5-6 + 6:3-4a.

Jesus Christ warned us about another potential bad attitude that could appear in the church. It is foreshadowed by things He taught. 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). We are not to presume a hierarchy among ourselves; Jesus Christ is the top of the hierarchy, and below Him we are equals. Jesus Christ contrasted two attitudes in Matthew 24:45-51:

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" [ASV].

The "faithful and wise servant" was taking care of the Lord's people. He would be rewarded. The "evil servant" is one who, during the Master's physical absence, presumed upon himself to "beat" the Master's servants, and to neglect what he himself was supposed to be doing. When the Master comes to recompense this conduct, He will punish the "evil servant" like "the hypocrites." Jesus Christ spoke to the Pharisees as so at Matthew 23:13 "Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (NBV); the "evil servant" who presumes to "beat" the Master's servants and neglect what s/he is supposed to be doing during the Master's physical absence will be punished like them. In Matthew 23:8-10 and 24:45-51, we are warned against presuming for ourselves a place above 'common servants' to punitively maltreat servants of Jesus Christ.

¹ NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

We now turn to the New Testament-era church. We begin with attitudes among the congregation at Rome. We start with Romans 14:1-13a

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians disagreed with each other over several religious details, and that this was expected to continue unopposed. Romans 14:1-13a has within it "Who are you to censure the servant of another" and "let us no longer censure one another." In regards to these religious disagreements, there was more than just disagreeing or expressing disagreement: there was censuring.¹ⁿ This means that because of these disagreements, there were people in the congregation treating Christians as if those Christians were bad. This passage disapproves of such and makes it clear that this was to stop.

People among the congregation at Rome did more than "censure" regarding these disagreements; they were also prone to presume to decide what Christians were 'acceptable' or not. We see the latter in Romans 15:5-7, which says:

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

This passage urges that, despite the disagreements listed in Romans 14:1-13, those Christians are to be in "harmony with one another" and are to "accept one another."²ⁿ They were directed to do the latter at Romans 15:7, which clarifies as so: "just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." Jesus Christ accepted us despite our imperfections – we are to do likewise.

In Romans 14:1-13 there were those who presumed to "censure" Christians who did not agree with their opinions on religious details. They did more than "censure"; according to Romans 15:5-7 they were also prone to presume to decide what Christians were 'acceptable' or not on the basis of these disagreements. Those guilty valued their religious precepts so much that they would not accept as an 'okay' Christian anyone who would not agree with their precepts. Both of these attitudes were disapproved of in Scripture. Both passages directed those with those attitudes to make corrections.

¹ If any matter based on Scripture inference was truly so important as to merit censuring, it is doubtful that the Lord would have left it non-explicit and dependent on human inference. Rather, the Lord more likely would have expressed it quite explicitly, as was His practice throughout Bible times.

² This does not mean we cannot think someone is wrong nor say that someone is wrong. However, we cannot presume that a Christian is 'unacceptable' to us because of real or perceived 'wrongness.'

We now turn to later in the New Testament-era church. First, we take a moment to review the Pharisees. Their prominent work was meticulous examination of the Old Testament Law, devising of specific guidelines for following it in many possible situations, and passing those on as tradition.¹ Christ said at Matthew 23:23 that they "have left undone the weightier matters of the law | – being fair, showing mercy, and being loyal" (ASV | ICB). When it came to adhering to the Lord's priorities, the Pharisees were uninterested. Jesus Christ reproved the Pharisees' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning their "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. This "tradition of men" was a mass of inferences of Scripture, and the problem was that they were treating their inferences of Scripture as divine truths. Out of zeal for their ideas about how to serve God, when Jesus Christ went against one of their inferences of Scripture, the Pharisees "began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (NASB) per Mark 3:1-6. They eventually did murder Him. For their devotion to their ideas about 'how to serve God,' they murdered the Son of God Himself. Quite accurately did Jesus Christ say to them at Matthew 23:15 "you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (ESV). The Pharisees were devoted to promoting their own ideas about 'how to serve the Lord' but uninterested in serving the Lord.

Later, the church was affected by other people who placed too much value on their ideas about 'truths of the Lord.'²ⁿ Per 1 Timothy 1:5-7, "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law" (NASB). We see this described:

<p><i>Titus 3:8b-9a</i> "I desire that you insist on these things, so <i>that those who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good deeds </i>. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable" (ESV ASV ESV NLT 1996, RSV 1952 ASV).</p>	<p><i>1 Timothy 6:3-4a</i> "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).</p>
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The "law" = first five books of Scripture. These people focused on Scripture, just like the Pharisees. They were neglecting "words" of Jesus Christ that He actually spoke, "love from a pure heart and good conscience and a sincere faith" and "good deeds" and "godly life." Like the Pharisees, these people were so devoted to their ideas about 'truths of the Lord' that they set aside what the Lord expressly said He wants us to focus on. That these ideas about 'truths of the Lord' came from attention to Scripture was irrelevant – the Lord still did not approve of this situation.

We should learn from these disapproved attitudes which we have seen among the warnings of Jesus Christ, among the Pharisees, among the Roman congregation, and among the 060's C.E church. Even if our religious precepts are Scripture-based, we should never love our religious precepts so much that we neglect or refuse to do what the Lord has expressly said He wants us to do.

¹ NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

² How might a person know if s/he has fallen into this trap? Two self-examination questions come to mind:

- 1) 'If Jesus Christ was to directly ask you to expend more on things He taught about and expend less on promoting favored precept/s, would you refuse?'
- 2) 'If someone shows you that a means you are using to promote favored precept/s might be in discordance with God's written Word, do you both
 - disregard this potential problem, and
 - instead try to show the favored precept/s to be correct and to merit being promoted?'

If 'yes' to either, a person may very likely be more devoted to serving idea/s of 'truths of the Lord' than to actually serving Him. S/he has cause for concern.

At extremes, it would show that the person is not a Christian, but even if the person is a Christian, this is still a problem. Serving the Lord must come first.

Pride and Divisiveness

Possibly the sin that is doing the most to promote factionism and acts of division in the church is pride. 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.

Topic #1 of 3: The Connection in Two Characters of Scripture

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. The connection between pride and factiousness is clear in Scripture.³ⁿ

Satan is not human, and is incapable of appearing a part of the church. He had the sins of pride, lying, and slander. Diotrefes, a mortal, had all of these characteristic sins of Satan, but being a mortal among the Lord's church, he had this additional sin: divisiveness.

To any of us in the church who think we are so much 'better' that we are comfortable dividing against other Christians, this ought to be a warning. We should have an aversion to such sentiments.

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 It is just as clear in church history. A very clear expression of it is written by mid-1800's leader among a group that denied those not baptized properly to be Christians:

"Let us agree to commune with the sprinkled sects around us, and soon we shall come to recognize them as Christians. Let us agree to recognize them as Christians, and immersion, with its deep significance, is buried in the grave of our folly. Then in not one whit will we be better than others."*

The reason for seeking to have this division is explicitly clear: a belief that they are "better than others" and a desire to stay that way.

* Moses E. Lard quoted by quoted by Ralph G. Wilburn in his article in Blakemore, The Renewal of Church (ed. Osborne, Volume 1 Renewal of Tradition), page 1:232.

Topic #2 of 3: The Role of Pride and Covetousness

Possibly the sin that is doing the most to promote factionism and acts of division in the church is pride. 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 διχσοστασια,¹ and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV); διχσοστασια 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.

Let us behold a history lesson from Scripture. At Matthew 16:15-8, Scripture records a conversation of Jesus Christ 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 Πετρος and "rock" is πετρα. Πετρος means "a small stone" and πετρα means "a foundation boulder."⁴ Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πετρα. The πετρα was what was said shortly before: "You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God." This is the premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.⁵ⁿ

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁶ This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and is plural for Greek meaning "one who follows one's teachings."⁷ Hence, Jesus Christ was essentially saying 'I will build My community of ones who follow My teachings' when He said at Matthew 16:18 "I will build MY church."

One of the oldest sins is that of Satan. Per, Isaiah 14:12-5, Lucifer/Satan made the boast "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917), which got him ejected from Heaven and doomed to God's wrath. In the church, it is an old temptation to try to make the Lord's church into an agency to follow their teachings - essentially making the Lord's church at least partly their church. In trying to make the Lord's church at least partly their church too, they are thinking "I will be like the Most High."

1 Timothy 1:5-6 "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 Paul warned

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.

"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."¹ 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." 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 departing from teachings on godly living and off-focus from what Jesus Christ said "words" about, and were focused on promoting their own thoughts in the Lord's church.

The result was factions. At Titus 3:8b-11 we have

"I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good [deeds.] These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" (ASV|ESV|ASV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|ASV).

Greek translated "factious man" Titus 3:8-11 is translated "heretick" in the KJV. `Heresies' transliterates Greek αἵρεσις plural for "party"²/clique and "choosing."³ The "factious man" is someone engaging in "foolish questionings" unrelated to "good deeds." Pairing this with 1 Timothy 1:5-6 and 6:3-4, we see that leaving "doctrine" about "godly life" and the "words" of Jesus Christ for a "different doctrine" related to "foolish questionings" leads to factions.

When people push their own teachings in the Lord's church to the point of creating factions, a common opinion is this: `I am sure the Lord wants us to teach/do this.' Many times, there is good reason to think that the Lord is pleased by a teaching we come up with – but which He was not explicit about. Such occasions do not rightly supplant what He explicitly said.

The Lord was explicit about functional unity. 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). The Lord was explicit that He does want this.

It is more than a little bold to act against what Christ expressly said He wants based upon what anyone THINKS He wants despite His not stating so explicitly. Not one of us mortals is the Lord. Ecclesiastes 5:2 states it clearly: "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth" (JPS 1917). 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). None of us knows with full knowledge what the Lord's thoughts are, and it is quite presumptuous to claim to know exactly what Christ wants taught without His say-so.

Many people treat disagreement with them on what they think the Lord wants taught as disagreement with the Lord Himself. This is not right, as no mortal is the Lord. Again, we behold Ecclesiastes 5:2 "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth" (JPS 1917). None of us mortals is the Lord. **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 `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; we should show our disapproval of them by staying separate from them.' Six prompt objections are apparent, which we will discuss in turn.

¹ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

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

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

- First, without the Lord's express say-so, none of us knows with 100% knowledge what the Lord wants taught or done. A disagreement with any of us over what the Lord would prefer taught is a disagreement solely with us – not a dispute against the Lord. None of us mortals are the Lord.
- Second, the Lord does not need our `help' to `clarify' Him in what He did not expressly say-so.
- Third, if the Lord did not expressly state a proposed teaching, but it is an inference on what some mortal thinks the Lord wants taught, then it is SOLELY what the mortal thinks. Humility and a reverent setting of the Lord above us mortals both require that this distinction be made.
- Fourth, any mortals' thinking that certain Christians ought to serve the Lord differently does not automatically mean that those Christians sin against the Lord. Others' displeasing us about their service to the Lord does not mean that they displease the Lord, because we are not the Lord.
- Fifth, none of us have been appointed to be `God's little helper' to seek and punish those not serving the Lord rightly. Romans 14:4a says "Who art thou to censure another's servant?" (ASV|NBV).
- Sixth, even if any of us infer rightly that the Lord would like a given human inference to be taught, this would not necessarily mean that He wants us to divide over it.

Romans 16:17 says what it says about 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). Greek διχοστασια literally means "standing apart."¹ The act of διχοστασια "standing apart" is to act to dissociate from others; this is prohibited in the Lord's church. Jesus Christ expressly said at John 17:20-1a "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV).

Remember, the Lord's church is HIS church. May none of us mortals presume to divide the Lord's church against His express will on the basis of what any of us thinks. Regardless of if a mortal thinks the Lord wants us to teach something s/he inferred He does, there is no place for mortals to divide the Lord's church on the basis of their teachings. It does not matter if such teachings are right; none of us mortals should presume to divide the Lord's church against His express will. Christians should keep in mind Whose church it is.

Topic #3 of 3: The Role of Pride and Presumption

Many people think that `going to church' is the core religious obligation of Christians. The practice of church assembly is commanded, and its purpose is explained, in Hebrews 10:24-5

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

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds,² which are things Jesus Christ taught during His entire earthly ministry. We should be assembling for that purpose.

However, church assembly is not the primary religious obligation of any Christian. Let us look at Acts 8:26-39. At Acts 8:27 we meet the Ethiopian eunuch. He is reading the Book of Isaiah. Philip, a Christian of the Jerusalem congregation, is sent to meet him. At Acts 8:35 Philip "told him the good news about Jesus" (NBV). The Scriptures' first report of his accepting the Gospel is at Acts 8:36 "See, here is water. What is to prevent my being baptized" (NBV). That wish he expressed is how he accepted. Acts 8:39 reports "But when they came up from the water, the Lord's Spirit took Philip away and the eunuch did not see him any more; he went joyfully on his way" (NBV) back to Ethiopia. This would have taken him away from all congregations to assemble with, but his regular life had him going that way. Philip had made and baptized a disciple of Jesus Christ, and what was needed was taken care of as far as the Lord was concerned. It is apparent that church assembly was not a priority in the new Christian's life as a Christian; it was time for the new Christian to be sent onward to go serve Christ with his regular life.

Church assembly has a purpose of supporting Christian living; Hebrews 10:24-5 says

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

² Any congregation neglecting this fails in its divinely-appointed reason to exist.

"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 is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly, and then reiterated: to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds, which are things Jesus Christ taught during His earthly ministry. A widely-told story among Friends/Quakers is about when a visitor to a silent meeting asked a Friend/Quaker "When does the service begin?" to which the Friend/Quaker said "The service begins when the meeting ends."¹ This terminology corrects many Christians' misperceptions, and is exactly correct: church meetings are to support Christian service to the Lord, and our primary service to the Lord is done in our regular lives away from assembly.

Christians largely agree on how to conduct ourselves in regular living, as Christ taught mostly about regular living. Because Christians are so similar in their regular lives, many people think 'what sets us apart' is events of congregational assembly. Many people think they serve and/or obey the Lord better than everyone else because of their congregation and what happens during its meetings. This error fuels division when people presume to 'punish' the 'disobedient' by separating from them.

If any would presume perfect obedience to the Lord at any time of the week, 1 John 1:9 says "If we |admit| our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (ASV|PEB|ASV). Christians are expected to acknowledge that they sin, which means none of us obeys the Lord perfectly. John 1:10 warns "If we say we have not sinned, | we make Him out to be a liar" (ESV|NBV). In as much as any does the former, s/he does the latter. Scripture approves the practice of "esteemeth every day alike" (ASV) at Romans 14:5, so ultimately, no day is distinct, so presuming to claim perfect obedience for any time is against 1 John 1:10. 1 Peter 5:5b warns that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (ESV).

If any of us would presume s/he does obey the Lord while others do not, and make that claim on the basis of church assembly matters, s/he makes a serious mistake. No Christian obeys the Lord perfectly - period. Affairs of church congregations amount to just a small fraction of a Christian's 24x7=168-hour workweek. Even if a congregation meets 10 hours a week, this is less than 6% of the Christian's 168-hour workweek. Further, Hebrews 10:24-5 points out that the purpose of church assembly is to support overall Christian living - it does not have a primary role in the Christian's life, as confirmed at Acts 8:26-39 by the Ethiopian being permitted to continue away from congregations.

No Christian is made 'more legitimately Christian' by affairs of church assembly. To divide from others in the church on the basis of self-exalting factiousness is biblically wrong. Again, 1 John 1:9 says "If we |admit| our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (ASV|PEB|ASV). 1 John 1:10 warns "If we say we have not sinned, | we make Him out to be a liar" (ESV|NBV). In as much as any does the former, s/he does the latter. Christians should never dare assert that there is a setting in which they obey the Lord fully and without flaw, and thereby have no sin. Christians are expected to acknowledge that they sin, which means none of us obeys the Lord perfectly - including during church assembly.

At Matthew 23:8 Jesus 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. In closing a parable, Christ warned at Matthew 24:48-51 "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 a position for himself to beat other servants, and forsook what he himself was supposed to be doing. Many people have done similar among the church. Romans 14:4 has "Who art thou | to censure another's servant?" (ASV|NBV). None of us is in a position to seek out and chastise/punish those whom we think serve the Lord improperly on the basis of some inaccurately self-assumed 'right obedience.'

¹ Trueblood, The People Called Quakers, page 105.

This includes the handful of hours we assemble in church congregations.¹ⁿ Hebrews 10:24-5 states that the purpose of church assembly is to support overall Christian living – church assembly does not have a primary role in the Christian’s life, as confirmed at Acts 8:26-39 by the Ethiopian being left to continue back to his regular life away from extant congregations. Therefore, we best not think we are in a position to ‘punish’ anyone ‘for the Lord’ based on our supposed ‘right obedience’ in church congregation assembly affairs.

Church congregation assembly is NOT of primary importance in the Christian’s obligations; church congregation assembly is of supporting importance in the Christian’s obligations. It does not qualify as a basis for Christian’s judging each other as ‘faithful’ versus ‘not faithful,’ nor does it qualify as a basis for setting aside Scripture’s commands for unity nor Scripture’s prohibitions against division. Many church people need to accept this.

Accept That Acts of Division Really Are of Sin

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). Greek διχοστασια is in Galatians 5:19-21 which lists some “works of the flesh” (ASV) = “wrong things the sinful self does” (ICB) that begins “sexual immorality,” has “idolatry” (ESV) and διχοστασια,² and ends with “drunkenness|, orgies” (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια literally means “standing apart.”³ The act of διχοστασια “standing apart” is to act to separate and dissociate from others. These passages make clear that doing this in the church is carnal sin.

Topic #1 of 3: Favoritism

At times, Christians intentionally have little to do with other Christian groups, but main the motivation is not mainly dislike of other Christian groups; instead, the main motivation is ‘preferring to keep to our own.’⁴ⁿ This is still conduct of division in the church. Greek διχοστασια “standing apart”⁵ is shown wrong at Galatians 5:19-21 and Romans 16:17, and although the motive is ‘preferring to keep to our own,’ the prohibited action is still being done.

Further, James 2:1 says “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism” (NASB). We need to resist partiality-motivated favoritism in the church regarding whom we choose to interact with or not.

Topic #2 of 3: Being Slothful in Duty

Ephesians 1:1 KJV “at Ephesus” was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,⁶ which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This epistle was originally a circular epistle intended for all Christians, and was addressed directly to all church congregations.

¹ Some Christians accuse other Christians of non-devoutness based on congregation precepts. They allege that ‘those others’ have the congregation procedures and tenets that they do because ‘They want to please themselves and do not care about the Lord.’ They think that those congregation precepts are a sign of the holders’ ‘lack of faithfulness to the Lord.’ The accusers think this justifies reproofs.

Congregation precepts affect only a small part of Christian life. If such suspicions were really accurate, those Christians would make it readily apparent in overall life, where there are more worldly allures. The fact is, among Christians, we commonly have to inquire about church affiliation to know the difference.

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

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

⁴ Christians who do this cheat themselves of opportunities for growth from the larger church.* It merits pointing out that some Christians pressure those among their groups to shun outside groups with a ‘Are we not enough?’-type rebuke. Regardless of what some factious people might allege, loyalty does not require factiousness.

* Pointed out by DeGroot, The Nature of the Church and Other Studies, page 13.

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

⁶ Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

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).

There are going to be situations where disagreement prevents sharing a task¹ⁿ or all parts of a task. For the latter, the two should try to work through or around differences.

Behold an example. Among Baptists, it is commonly taught that baptism is unrelated to salvation, although very important. Among Churches of Christ, it is commonly taught that baptism is point of salvation. Vacation Bible School at a Baptist church approached, and a Christian from the Churches of Christ requested to work with these children; s/he was made a teacher. To not betray trust of the Baptist church's leadership, the Church of Christ Christian did not discuss baptism when discussing the way to Heaven. Matthew 28:19a is translated "So go and make followers of all people in the world" (ICB), which is something we are told to do. S/he could not present all s/he would have liked to in this process, but rather than do nothing, s/he did what s/he could.²ⁿ In the church, we need to be willing to set aside personal wishes to further the work for the Lord.

Ephesians 4:3 says to be "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (ASV). It says that to "keep the unity" we have to be "giving diligence." This means it is expected to take effort. There are going to be times when it is hard to work together as a single church of Jesus Christ. Rather than take inconveniences and difficulties and say 'Well, I guess we cannot work together,' we are told to make an effort of "diligence" to enact our unity in the Lord.

Topic #3 of 3: Spiritualizing, Rationalizations, and Excuses

Fleshly *διχοστasia* "standing apart"³ of Galatians 5:19-21 and Romans 16:17 is a carnal sin. At Galatians 5:19-21 it is included in a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV). Such sins should not be 'spiritualized' by 'holy-sounding' language. The sin of *διχοστasia* "standing apart" within the church has been 'sugar coated' by calling it "separation from the world." This misuses 2 Corinthians 6:17 "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate" (ASV) about the spiritual relationship of believers to unbelievers; it cannot be applied to relationships among Christians. Also, to 'be divisive for the Lord' is the same as 'sinning for the Lord.' The sin of *διχοστasia* "standing apart" in the church remains a sin regardless of what words mortals apply to it.

Is it enough to 'phase off' lying, adulterous encounters, or cussing? Should we accommodate wishes of any church people to be sexually immoral, drunkards, or swindlers in church business? Hopefully, readers would answer 'no' to all of these. We should want such sins eradicated, and we should not want such sins accommodated in the church's business. Fleshly *διχοστasia* "standing apart" of Galatians 5:19-21 and Romans 16:17 should not be treated any differently.

Such a carnal sin needs to be treated in the same way as similar sins. Christians are expected to fight temptation to "sexual immorality," and those who struggle with "drunkenness" are expected to fight their temptation for strong drink. The church should do what it can to help those who struggle with these sins to resist them. Christians need to realize that temptation toward acts of division is also a temptation that should be resisted.

¹ Example: I would not join a Christian theological liberal Bible skeptic at an event to 'redefine' Scripture's relevance -- but I would join that Christian in service, assembly, or prayer.

² Real event. Per Hebrews 13:17a "Obey your leaders and submit to them" (RSV 1952), teachers should carefully and tactfully avoid teaching against what the congregation leadership would permit. This is especially true in congregations being visited. Proverbs 18:2 warns that "The fool" has fixation "only to air his thoughts" (JPS 1985); it is wise per Scripture to not be insistent upon presenting one's own views. In awkward situations, the teacher can try 'Ask your...' or 'This church teaches...' or 'As a congregation we teach...' or just 'We teach...' or similar.

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

In divisive denominations/`fellowships'/`brotherhoods,' many seem to believe that we should accommodate divisive `sensitivities'¹ⁿ by acting on truths of church unity slowly. This violates James 4:17 "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (NASB). Further, Romans 16:17 refutes such plans of inaction by stating that divisive conduct in the church of Jesus Christ's followers is sin; *partaking* in it *to accommodate* others *is still partaking in the sin*.

Group pressure can have the same effect as organizational structure with governance.² Even without explicit governance, sometimes political manipulations among a group's respected institutions enforce conformity to `expectations,'³ as do social pressures.⁴ⁿ Some denominations and `fellowships'/`brotherhoods' are predominantly composed of bodies that insist on violating Romans 16:17, although degrees vary. We should be mindful that as congregations of Jesus Christ's disciples, our main purpose is to serve Jesus Christ. If others in our denomination, `association,' `fellowship,' or `brotherhood' are set on sin, we need to remember that we are to serve first the *LORD* Jesus Christ -- NOT a denomination, `association,' `fellowship,' `brotherhood' or whatever term is used.⁵ⁿ

Galatians 6:8a warns "The one who sows for his own flesh will harvest ruin from his flesh" (NBV) - this warning applies to anyone who "sows" according to carnal lusts for divisive conduct. It is unwise to participate in this with them. We should not placate those who insist upon divisive conduct; Ephesians 5:11a says "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (ESV).

¹ Too often, biblically unmerited `sensitivities' negatively affecting Christians get accommodated. In such cases, we take opportunities and privileges away from people that the Bible permits those opportunities for. This is done in order to accommodate people who would be `offended.'

We should heed the lesson of the *DIS*approved example at Galatians 2:11-4, which principles how such accommodations are not "according to the truth" 2:14 (ASV). Gender and `who believes what' are frequent causes of contra-Scripture accommodations as of c. 2000. Of course, any such contra-Scriptural accommodations of biblically unmerited `sensitivities' against the Lord's people should be promptly discontinued.

² Whalen, Separated Brethren, page 114.

³ C. Allen, Things Unseen: Churches of Christ In (and After) The Modern Age, page 193.

⁴ This is called "peer pressure" when adolescents do it, and it is disdained when adolescents use it to pressure each other to do what they know they should not do. It is also common among adolescents to use peer pressure to get everyone to shun people they do not like, and this also is disdained as juvenile. It should be apparent that such behaviors are quite unbecoming the church.

⁵ Also, leaders motivated by power and/or offering-plate income should heed past and present. In the mid-1900's, the argument-racked Churches of Christ group showed more interest in details of religious tenets than in morals/ethics, and many people left.* A later study of them found `accept versus be critical of' those who differ to be linked to congregation growth versus decline.**

In decades around 2000, many Christians desire most personal transformation and growth as Christians, versus party-line loyalty, restrictiveness, and divisiveness, and a result is new congregations in a "Community Church" movement.[†] This means those Christians were leaving those other church congregations. Since then, a phenomenon has begun of factious church congregations renaming themselves "___ Community Church" hoping to appear non-factious, and/or hoping to get and `win over' non-factious Christians. Even so, this does not change the fact that the beginning of the Community Church movement was from the original causes.

Preferring religious arguments and insisting upon conformity has made a difference between growth and decline. Scripture may not be enough to motivate all divisive church leaders to do what they should. Concern for offering-plate income might help motivate some of them to `lay off' divisiveness. For some, if the groups of which they are leaders were to wither away, they would cease to have a group to be leader of; this knowledge might help motivate them to `lay off' divisiveness.

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

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

† Mead, et al, Handbook of Denominations, page 316.

Concerns about 'Doctrine'

Division is a tactic long used by factionists to enact disapproval of Christians 'not on board' in promoting religious tenets they want promoted. However, not all divisiveness is ill-intentioned.

Topic #1 of 3: Desire for 'Doctrinal Quarantine'

There are well-intentioned people who fear that other groups will 'taint' their people with 'error,' or that people in other groups will be disruptively aggressive in promoting disagreed-over religious tenets. If principles of biblical church unity are followed, these concerns would be nullified.

Hebrews 13:17 has "Obey your leaders and submit to them; |for they watch in behalf of your souls" (RSV 1952|ASV). Each congregation has a governance, even if everybody. Some governances are a plurality of elders/presbyters like in Scripture, and some are in other forms. Regardless, when a congregation's leadership is acting out of care for the spiritual well-being of its members, among that congregation we are to "obey" "and submit to them." When Christians assemble with other congregations, they should honor the authority of those congregations' leaders then.

Church congregations have a common divinely-appointed purpose. 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: for Christians to encourage each other to live Christ-preached Christian lives of love and doing good deeds.¹ⁿ Disruptions to this should be avoided.

We put the above considerations together. We ought not advocate disputed religious precepts when it would normally be prohibited by involved congregations' leaders,²ⁿ and we ought not advocate such precepts when it would cause arguments distracting from a congregation's business.

Proverbs 18:2 says "The fool does not desire understanding, But only to air his thoughts" (JPS 1985). People who think 'It is always a good time to express my view'³ⁿ should take heed. There are times it is prudent not to express one's own thoughts 'I think the Lord would want this taught.'

A 'doctrinal quarantine' is not needed in biblical church unity; we ought to simply insist that people be sensitive and responsible. Still, regardless of any discomfort about other groups' religious precepts, Scripture gives no permission to set aside commands against acts of dividing.

Topic #2 of 3: 'We Do Not Want to Appear to Be Endorsing Their Views'

To not divide is not a matter of approving religious precepts. 1 Corinthians 8 talks about accommodating the "weak" (ASV). 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:

¹ Any church congregation neglecting this purpose neglects its reason to exist.

² 1 Peter 5:3 says that church leaders should govern "not| as lording it over |those in your charge" (ESV|ASV|ESV). Luke 6:31 says "Treat others exactly how you would have them treat you" (NBV). Congregation leaders should not abuse their authority to needlessly restrict someone from expressing views they dislike, and/or to press their views on their congregation. Still, there are times when expressing divergent views can cause arguments that are genuinely disruptive. In such cases, a congregation's leadership has good reason to restrain expressions of disagreed-with views.

³ If any such view was truly so vital, the Lord would have stated it explicitly Himself. He does not need our 'help' to 'fix' His 'non-clarity' on 'show-stoppingly urgent stuff.'

"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].

First we note that a Christian's presence at an idol temple meal was not treated as approval thereof.¹ⁿ Second, despite that eating food sacrificed to idols has no religious reality, and in itself the believer has "liberty" to do so, s/he should not if it could cause another Christian to do what s/he thinks s/he should not do. Still, to know that eating sacrifices to idols is religiously meaningless is "knowledge."

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 is taught toward "knowledge." Many people wrongly think that accommodating the "weak" permits acts of division 'lest the weak think we approve of that group's precepts.' *Nothing here permits doing deeds the Bible prohibits.*

It does not matter what we think: *the Bible prohibits acts of division in the church and does not permit expressing disagreement by division.* We can express disagreement only in other ways.

Topic #3 of 3: 'Where Is Your Conviction? What about Doctrine?'

In disagreement, many 'take a stand for the truth' by dividing against others in the church to show disapproval of their precepts, and think doing so is good. However "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (ESV) per 2 Corinthians 11:14. About him, 1 Peter 5:8 warns "be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (ASV). What is evil can be made to seem good,²ⁿ so let us "be watchful" and adhere to Scripture.

First, recall that "Christians" is a rename of "disciples" (NASB) = "followers" (ICB) at Acts 11:26. We are disciples of Jesus Christ; we follow Him. Doctrine is an "it." *Nowhere in Scripture are we shown as servants of doctrines*; recall the precept of 1 Corinthians 4:6 quoted in the footer.

Second, Galatians 6:10b calls Jesus Christ's church the "household of the faith" (NASB). Jesus Christ speaks negatively of household infighting at Mark 3:25b "if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" (ASV).

Third, Romans 16:17 is plain in the New Testament-era church's text: there is major sin when people do and promote διχοστασια "standing apart"³ in Jesus Christ's community of followers.

*** *Scripture nowhere teaches 'disagree/disapprove = grounds to divide from.'* ***

Scripture never authorizes setting aside Romans 16:17 for religious tenets 'just on principle.' Note the New Testament-era church precept 1 Corinthians 4:6 in the footer. Scripture doctrine opposes sin.

¹ The idea 'presence always implies approval' is a human notion not taught by Scripture.

² Some factionists were led to truly think factious conduct is good. It may rightly seem amiss when fellow Christians get treated as 'less a neighbor' than most unbelievers. Still, they think 'compromise on the fight' would show lack of zeal for Christ.

Romans 15:4 says "Everything that was written in the past | was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (ICB|NASB). This refers to the Old Testament; the New Testament-era church considered the Old Testament's lessons important.

The story of Naaman at 2 Kings 5 might help. Naaman wanted to be cured of leprosy, and was told to dip in the Jordan River seven times. He went away offended. His servants said to him at 5:13 "if the prophet told you to do something difficult, would you not do it? How much more when he only said to you, 'Bathe, and be clean'" (JPS 1985). He did, and was healed. It is best to set aside a desire to go 'above and beyond' if it would detract from simply doing as the Lord simply called for.

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

We are not forbidden disputes over religious disagreement, but must not let it lead to sin. The Bible has neither a `disagreement exception' nor `rightness exemption' for commands against factious conduct. No assembly-time precept merits sin. As Christians, we are to have convictions against sin.

Truth: The New Testament has fewer calls against being `too accepting' than it has against factiousness. God's written Word shows more concern about the latter than the former.

Whose Community of Followers?

At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). The word translated "church" in the New Testament is *ἐκκλησία*. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.¹ 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"² 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 *ἐκκλησία* is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers.

Jesus Christ ordained His *ἐκκλησία*, meaning His community of followers. A healthy community lives harmoniously. That is what He sought 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). In Jesus Christ's community of followers, we should live harmoniously to enact His teachings.

Strife-motivated division works against this. In a strife-motivated community division, the harmony vanishes. The community ceases to be as much of a community.

Many church people are perfectly content for this to be so - or at least they are on their end. They are perfectly content to allow Christ's will of a community to be less-so for as long as there are Christians who do not agree with their teachings about `how to please Christ.'

Some people wish for a form of church unity - and seek it by telling `everyone else' what to do and believe in order that `We can accept unity with them.' This seeks a harmonious community enacting their teachings, but for as long as this does not happen, they will resist doing their part to be a harmonious community enacting Christ's teachings. This should not be so.

This is supposed to be Jesus Christ's church, meaning His community of followers. A community should be harmonious; we should be a harmonious community enacting His teachings.

Recognize and Accept Who Has and Has Not Authority in What

At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). The word translated "church" in the New Testament is *ἐκκλησία*. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.³ 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"⁴ 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 *ἐκκλησία* is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers.

Topic #1 of 2: Compulsion

Now, 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 **ONE** Person Who is the Ultimate Boss of His church. Not even His apostles could claim an authority equal to Him or even above the other apostles.

¹ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

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

³ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

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

Jesus Christ's earthly teaching focused on what we are to do and what values to have as we conduct our regular lives. He had very little to say about religious opinions to have. In order for a person to go against Jesus Christ's teachings, s/he would have to act or live in a manner contrary to what He taught about. That was the approach held in the church.

1 Corinthians 5:11 specifies that we "must not associate with any who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral or greedy, idolaters or slanderers, drunkards or swindlers" (TNIV). 2 Thessalonians 3:6b-7 has

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

The reasons for these authorized punitive actions in the church are to address life-pervasive indulgences in irresponsible living and carnal vice.

The subject of religious thinking is handled differently; accountability over that is in the Lord's jurisdiction. Here is how mortals are to handle differing religious thought per Romans 14:1-13a:

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians disagreed over several religious details – and wrote these two things: "Who are you to censure the servant of another" and "let us no longer censure one another." We might think someone is wrong and say so, but we are not to "censure" each other; to "censure" people is to address them like they have 'been bad.' As we see in Romans 14:1-13a, matters of religious thinking are not fitting subjects for mortals to "censure" Christians.

We now turn to another passage that discusses difference in religious thought among Christians: 1 Corinthians 8:1-11. We start at 1 Corinthians 8:1-6

"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, eating food sacrificed to idols has no religious reality. To know this was "knowledge." We now continue 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].

Here at 1 Corinthians 8:7-11, we see some that Christians did not fully understand that eating food sacrificed to idols has no religious reality. Some Christians were accustomed to thinking of idols as real, and saw eating food in their temples as an act of religious reality. Christians with "knowledge" were to be responsible: they were to avoid causing the other Christians to do things they "feel is wrong." Romans 14:23 has "Anything that is done without believing it is right is a sin" (NCV); if Christians cause other Christians to do such things, they do wrong too even if they are right.

There are church people who presume for themselves a position to act punitively against servants of Christ in any matter - including in areas of religious thought. We have seen from Scripture that Christians are not to do such things. Some go beyond these impermissible things: they seek to press Christians to do things those Christians think would be wrong.

Christians disagree on numerous issues. Some Christians accept as Scripture additions to the Old Testament; some Christians do not. Some Christians think Jesus Christ is God by means of a Trinity; others think He is God another way. Some Christians think that one cannot please Jesus Christ without worship-like attention to His mother; others know differently. Some Christians think every Christian should speak in tongues, some Christians think at least they should speak in tongues, and some Christians think no Christians should speak in tongues. Some Christians think that water baptism is forbidden at present, while others know different. Also related to baptism, some Christians think that 'infant baptism' and non-immersion ceremonies are valid enough that a real baptism would be rebaptism and thereby sin; other Christians know different. The list could go on.

Getting Christians to follow religious courses of action they think are prohibited them is getting them to sin. It does not matter if the perception is due to a lack of "knowledge" of the empirical truth: if the Christian thinks it is wrong, then s/he sins if s/he does it. Further, even if the causers have "knowledge" of the empirical truth, they sin when they cause Christians to do things those Christians think are wrong - even if the latter's perceptions are due to lack of "knowledge."

We are not permitted to act punitively toward servants of Christ in areas of religious thought. Also, in matters of religious thought, we must not presume to press Christians to do what they think is wrong - because otherwise we push them toward sin, and sin ourselves. 'Censure by division' is often a means for such compulsion. Reducing unauthorized compulsion would reduce factiousness.

Topic #2 of 2: Deciding 'Acceptability'

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" is διαμερισμος.¹ It appears only at Luke 12:51 and the sense there is "strife" ² contrasted to "peace" ³ referring to hostility against Christians by the world. There will be 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. 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 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."⁵ A Christian is

¹ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

² in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

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.

'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. Any person who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be following His teachings in daily life is a Christian.

Any person who is a Christian must be distinguished from the world. The world is not made holy by God. 1 John 2:16 says "For 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,"¹ so "pure religious service" is to serve people and to "keep oneself unspotted from the world." The world is not a holy thing.

Regarding the church, Acts 2:47 examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved" (ASV|NASB). Colossians 3:12 says "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (NASB). Those in the church are "chosen of God, holy and beloved" - 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 "the temple of God" and "the temple of God is holy," so the people of the church are "holy."

The world is not a holy thing, as Scripture teaches; the people of the church are a holy thing, as the written Word of God teaches. Here is something to remember: 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 unbelieving world is to do just such a thing.

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. It is His church to decide admission to. Furthermore, He is Lord. If a person has fulfilled the one condition set by Jesus Christ to be admitted into His church, then s/he has met the one condition set by the Lord Jesus Christ for that person to be accepted within His church. This applies to the individual members thereof, as well as congregations thereof. S/he has been made holy, and no one in the Lord's church should dare presume to treat any Christian as being a part of this unholy world. No one should dare presume to deem 'unacceptable' or 'not quite acceptable' anyone whom the Lord has accepted. If s/he has been accepted by the Lord into His church, then s/he should be accepted by us in His church.

Seek After Righteousness

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

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

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

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

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

³ MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

Jesus Christ's church had not been instituted: "I will build my church." The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word¹ⁿ is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.² This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Acts 11:26 reports "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). At Matthew 16:15-8 Jesus Christ foreordained His one community of followers. He instituted His church at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I **have taught** you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). The "everything that I **have taught** you" meant chronologically up to that time; we can see these teachings in the New Testament gospels and Acts 20:35.

Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44 to describe those in Jesus Christ's church.³ Scripture uses "believers" (NASB) about servants of Jesus 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); μαθητας "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. The basic appointed task of the Christian is to be a follower of Jesus Christ's teachings. At John 17:20-1a, Jesus Christ prayed "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 wanted Christians to "all be one" in doing our appointed task of following His teachings.

Romans 16:17 has "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); "divisions" translates διχοστασια "standing apart"⁵ meaning a deliberate act of disassociation. To do so in the church is sin.

Ephesians 4:3 tells us to be "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (ASV). We are commanded to be "giving diligence to keep the unity" which the church should have. Scripture can tell us how; 2 Timothy 3:16-7 describes Scripture with

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

Scripture is given so that Christians can be "entirely instructed for all good work."⁷ⁿ From the Scriptures, we can be "entirely instructed" on what to DO to "keep the unity" the church should have.

¹ For more discussion, see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

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

³ Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, *Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, page 428.

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

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

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

⁷ Many people think the way to unity is to not believe Scripture. The Presbyterians can show us the error of this way. The denominational leadership of the Presbyterian Church (USA) does not take a stand for Scripture; the Presbyterian Church in America does. The former declined from 1980-8 while the latter grew 45%.* Implication: if Scripture were to be rejected by all, there would eventually be no church to unite. The reason: Scripture gives us Christ's message. A study of the Disciples of Christ found that those who had reduced their involvement did so for liberal handlings of Scripture twice as much as opposed to conservative.** The fastest growing parts of the church are in the Third World where Christians get most into the written Word.^*

* Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, page 465.

** Walter R. Schumm, Ruth C. Hatch, John Hevelone, and Kimberly R. Schumm article in D. Williams *A Case Study in Mainstream Protestantism*, page 537.

^* D'Souza, *What's So Great about Christianity*, page 11.

The Bible does not give us answers to every single religious curiosity mortals have come up with over the centuries.¹ⁿ It was not given for that purpose.

Scripture does not address the modern denominational system with non-factional associations of congregations, as no such system existed in the New Testament era. In ancient times all Christians believed the Bible; Scripture does not talk about people who doubt portions of Scripture but live good Christian lives. New Testament-era Christians universally understood proper baptism; Scripture does not talk about people mistaken about baptism. Tongues had not ceased in the church; Scripture does not address Christians wrong about tongues. Christians have always known Jesus Christ to be God in flesh; Scripture does not give much detail on how, nor does it talk about Christians mistaken on how. Scripture does not talk about Christians who do worship-like veneration of mortals. This list of items Christians have divided from Christians over, but which Scripture does not address, could go on.

There are things Scripture does explicitly teach about in regards to church unity. At John 17:20-1a, Jesus Christ 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 wanted those who "believe on" Him enough to be followers of His teachings to be united; that unity was to "all be one" in doing our appointed task of following His teachings. Romans 16:17 has "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV | ESV | NBV); "divisions" translates διχοστασια "standing apart."² To be "standing apart" means to be actively dissociating from others. Such action in the church is sin, and they had been taught against it. Ephesians 4:2-3 has "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). We are directed to be "giving diligence to keep the unity" which the church should have. These are things that Scripture does explicitly address.

Human thoughts about matters Scripture does not address should not become rationales to act discordantly with what Scripture does tell us to do. It is better to simply do as the written Word of God says rather than to not do so because of our own thoughts about what it does not address. Let us do as Scripture tells us to do against factionalism and for unity, and thereby seek after righteousness.

Accept a Distinction in Actions – A Lesson of Romans

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.³ This resembles how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ, which means 'Jesus Messiah' per John 1:41b "We have found the Messiah" and "which translated means Christ" (NASB). Before the event of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings"⁴ and is translated "followers" in the ICB. Hence, in a basic biblical definition of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus' followers.

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

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

¹ There are divisive people who pore over Scripture seeking to show that they are 'right' about some curiosity. They then assume that this gives them the right to divide. Even if they are right, it would not allow unauthorized division.

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

³ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

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

It is well-known that "Peter" is an Anglicization of one Greek word and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.¹ⁿ "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."² At Matthew 16:15-8 Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα. The πέτρα was what was said to Him shortly before: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."³ⁿ This is the one premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ/Messiah and the Son of the living God.³ⁿ

Regarding Christ, Colossians 1:18a says "And he is the head of the body, the church" (ASV). Acts 5:14 examples how "believers" were "added to the Lord" (ASV) then as now. Acts 2:47 examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved" (ASV|NASB)⁴ⁿ then as in the present. When a person becomes a believer in the one premise, the Lord adds that person to His one church.

Christians at that time were not identical in worship practice. At Acts 15:1-2 some Jewish Christians "began teaching the non-Jewish believers: 'You cannot be saved if you are not circumcised as Moses taught us.'" (NCV). This caused the Jerusalem Council, and at 15:5 "some of the believers who belonged to the Pharisee group came forward and said 'The non-Jewish believers must be circumcised. They must be told to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV). Per 15:24, this "troubled" (ASV) Gentile Christians. The "law of Moses" was the Old Covenant worship code. It involved ceremonies, dietary requirements, and other worship-specific actions which had to be kept in mind constantly. Gentiles did not follow this worship code. Hence, Acts 15 reports that Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians engaged in different worship-specific behavior during the New Testament period.⁵ After debate, there was a resolution. James said at Acts 15:19-20 "'So I think we should not bother the non-Jewish people who are turning to God. Instead, we should write a letter telling them these things: Stay away from food that has been offered to idols (which makes it unclean), any kind of sexual sin, eating animals that have been strangled, and blood" (NCV). The letter was then started at Acts 15:23 "From the apostles, and elders" (NCV) - but Jewish Christians continued to follow the Law of Moses. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "'Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at 21:24. There continued to be differences in worship style among Christians even after the Jerusalem Council - with approval. Hence, throughout the New Testament era, Christians had varying worship styles.

There were more differences among Christians in Christ's church than just worship styles. Romans 14:1-13a says

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but |do not| argue about opinions.| One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own

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 We do not 'join' ourselves to THE church by attaching to a church congregation. Membership in the Lord's church is an action by the Lord.

⁵ Noted in Lucado, The Inspirational Bible, page 1265.

mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.' So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. So let us no longer censure one another" (NASB|ICB|PEB|NASB|NBV).

Romans 14:1-13a shows that people who composed the church had differing beliefs on religious details - and were expected to have differing beliefs on religious details.¹ⁿ We therefore see that the Lord's church was not built on a worship style or on common religious opinions.

We have seen that Christians had varying worship styles and varying beliefs about religious details - and that this was entirely acceptable in the New Testament era. Nonetheless, 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 Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing. This is in the same epistle as Romans 14:1-13a. Christians were not expected to agree on beliefs about religious details, yet were instructed to refrain from acts of dividing. When the two are put together, the following becomes clear: *disagreement is not division*.

At Matthew 16:15-8 Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πετρα, which is what was said to Him shortly before: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is the premise which Christ's one church is built on: that truth that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah and the Son of the living God. Acts 2:47 examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved" (ASV|NASB).³ⁿ The church is not built on or made up of a worship style or a set of beliefs about religious details. Differences in these do NOT constitute a breach in the church because the church's foundation or composition is not these things. This is why the church continued to be one church even as worship styles and beliefs on religious details differed in the New Testament era.

The church should act accordingly. Difference in practice and disagreement do not necessitate division.⁴ⁿ For the church to do as the Lord intended in matters of disagreement, it will help to accept this: *DISAGREEMENT IS NOT DIVISION*.

¹ Hence, teaching that we should all agree on religious details is contrary to Scripture.

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

³ It is a good thing that membership in the Lord's church is a matter done by the Lord. If Christians who wish to be 'not in the same church as' others in Christ's church could actually make that happen, they would exclude themselves from the Lord's church -- to their own peril.

⁴ We can go even further. At Acts 15:36-41, Paul and Barnabas disagreed over how to proceed with a missions-related endeavor. Per 15:39, "there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another" (NASB). Barnabas took Mark south to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas north into Syria. This was before 1 Corinthians,* but at 1 Corinthians 9:5-6 Paul lists Barnabas and himself as equals among a list that includes "the other apostles" (ASV). Their disagreement+split did not stop Paul from respecting Barnabas and honoring and treating him as an esteemed peer and coworker.

We most certainly do not see any hint of antagonism or rivalry. We do not see Paul and Barnabas trying to pretend the other does not exist, nor do we see them trying to avoid acknowledging each other, nor do we see them trying to make and rally factions around themselves against each other, nor do we see them trying to 'one-up' each other, nor do we see them trying to undermine each other. Their disagreement led to a split, but it still did not result in disassociation, factionism, or strife.

The church would do well to note this example of how New Testament-era Christians handled disagreement and splits -- and then also apply the lessons.

* F. Smith, Daily Bible, pages 1520 and 1531.

Accept That Church Unity Is Simple

Paul at 1 Corinthians 4:17 refers to "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere" (NBV | ESV). Paul said at 1 Timothy 1:5-6 "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB). 2 Corinthians 11:3 refers to "the **simplicity** and the purity that is toward Christ" (ASV). The "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV) of Acts 2:42 was befitting the "**simplicity**" of 2 Corinthians 11:3.

The fundamental unity Jesus Christ urged 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) should also befit the "**simplicity**" (ASV) of 2 Corinthians 11:3. To have such unity, it should not take wrangling over administrative and organizational matters nor wrangling over academic and ceremonial precepts. Rather, the unity should simply be within the task of following Jesus Christ's teachings.

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."¹ A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings.

We turn to Acts 8:26-39. The Ethiopian official was puzzled over Isaiah 53. Philip, having been sent by God to him, "began to speak and, starting from that same Scripture, told him the | Good News about Jesus" (NBV | ICB). Another translation: "began to speak and, starting with that same Scripture, | preached unto him Jesus" (NBV | ASV). The Bible text has at Acts 8:35 what is translatable "told him the Good News about Jesus" or "preached unto him Jesus." The Ethiopian responded as so: "See, here is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?" (NBV) at Acts 8:36. Philip promptly did so at Acts 8:38 "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him" (NBV). Philip got no opportunity to tell him anything else: "But when they came up from the water, the Lord's Spirit took Philip away and the eunuch did not see him anymore; he went joyfully on his way" (NBV) back to Ethiopia per Acts 8:39. In Acts 8:26-39, the Ethiopian was taught "the Good News about Jesus" (ICB). To show acceptance of the Good News about Jesus Christ, he requested the privilege of baptism in His Name, which was promptly given. The Lord then allowed the Ethiopian official to continue on his way back to regular life. Enough had been done. The Ethiopian's accepting the "the Good News about Jesus" (ICB) was sufficient to merit baptism as a Christian,²ⁿ and the Lord taking Philip away before further instruction shows that what the Ethiopian accepted was enough to make him an adequate Christian. It was and is that simple.

A lot of people become new Christians and recognize other Christians as Christians simply because they fit the Bible meaning of "Christian." Unfortunately, the converts get influenced by factious people, who engage in a process of de-educating the new Christians about 'Why those other people are not adequately Christians.' This is wrong when compared to God's written Word. If what it takes to cross from non-Christian to an adequate Christian is simple, it should not take a lengthy training process to explain why 'apparent Christians are not Christians or adequate Christians.'

What it takes to be an 'adequate Christian' is simple. Therefore, who is to be recognized as 'fellow servant of Christ' is a simple matter. We need to accept it as so simple. We then need to simply be united in our common task to serve Jesus Christ by following His teachings, and simply let that suffice as our simple unity.

¹ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

² Matthew 28:19-20a has "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). Acts 11:26 shows that "Christians" is a rename of "disciples" (NASB); Jesus Christ ordered us to "baptize" "disciples" which means that we are to baptize Christians.

Treating Well Jesus Christ with "the Good Fight"

Regarding Jesus Christ, Colossians 1:18a says "And he is the head of the body, the church" (ASV). The church is the body of Christ.

Recall how we studied that the church is not a confederation of locations where people meet; the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers, and members of that community meet at various locations. I will summarize our previous study on the Bible meaning of "church"¹ translated from εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used about the community of followers of Pythagoras.² Christians are followers of Jesus Christ, as Acts 11:26 reports "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. In this Greek usage of εκκλησια, the church is the community of Jesus' followers. In the Greek Old Testament translation Septuagint, εκκλησια translated a Hebrew word designating a "gathering" of Israel for a specific purpose or a "gathering" representative of all Israel.³ That Hebrew term also referred to the general gathering of God's people without any set purpose.⁴ When ancient Greek-reading/hearing Christians met the word in the Greek New Testament, continued usage of εκκλησια about Christians would have identified Christians as the mass of God's people. When the word εκκλησια is used about the Christian church, it refers to the mass of Christians in the same way Israel was a nation of God's people. Both the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament and a normal meaning of εκκλησια point to this: the church is the collective body of Christ's followers. Therefore, Colossians 1:18a teaches that the collective body of Jesus Christ's followers is the body of Christ.

Let us take Scripture at face value. Contrary to what some believe, Scripture does have "things hard to understand" (NASB), as 2 Peter 3:16 plainly teaches.⁵ That is why those with access to Scripture must "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (ASV) at 2 Timothy 2:15. Scripture is not always easy to understand, and takes effort. Because it is a human effort, it will by necessity not be 100% perfect.

Let us notice some facts. Many Christians believe that Scripture teaches certain things, and others do not. There are Christians who think that Scripture passages point them to the Catholic hierarchy, despite Catholic authorities' early opposition to widespread access to readable Scripture because they feared it; many other Christians think a lot of the same Scripture passages point to Orthodoxy, and other Christians believe Scripture points away from both. Many Christians believe we should expect the same activity of the Holy Spirit as in the New Testament up to the end of the church age; other Christians believe 1 Corinthians 13:8 indicates that tongues would end at some time between the New Testament era and the end of the church age. Most Christians believe that Scripture teaches the Trinity; other Christians believe Scripture explicitly teaches against the Trinity, which some call "dividing God," and that Jesus Christ is fully God another way. Some Christians believe that the passages of Scripture teach that salvation is never lost; other Christians point to places that may be translatable or interpretable to suggest the opposite, as well as places which hypothetically discuss that possibility, and conclude that they anticipate such. Christians study Scripture their whole lives, and hold different conclusions on such distinctly-religious matters.

We are, however, mostly in agreement on what Scripture teaches for our 'normal' lives. Most Christians know that Scripture teaches honesty, integrity, generosity, kindness, doing what is good for and to our neighbor, diligence, purity, and similar lifestyle matters. While we do not always hold ourselves up to these standards, we are almost totally agreed on these doctrines of Scripture.

¹ Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church".

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

³ Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 42 NT.

⁴ In Renn, Expository Dictionary, pages 73, 76.

⁵ Pointed out in Stanley, Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible, page 1478.

That lifestyle is the reason we are called to assemble as congregations. Hebrews 10:24-5 explains the purpose of church congregations:

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

The purpose of church meetings is Christians encouraging each other to live lives of love and good deeds of the type Jesus Christ taught. Paul taught the same at 1 Corinthians 4:17 when mentioning "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV | ESV).

Christians can be part of the church without assembling at a congregation. This is taught by approved example at Acts 8:26-39, when an Ethiopian official who "was returning" (ASV) converted, and then after immediate baptism, the Holy Spirit took the evangelist away, and the Ethiopian official "went joyfully on his way" (NBV) back to Ethiopia -- away from all extant congregations of the church. He was now a Christian, but at first he did not assemble because no congregation was in his home country. In Scripture, church congregations are made by Christians; *Scripture NOWHERE gives church congregations or buildings power/authority to make/unmake Christians.*

Despite the fact that church congregation does not make a Christian, and overall consensus on the "good deeds" we are to meet to encourage each other to do per Hebrews 10:24-5, Christians are often quite unkind to each other because of congregation and/or agreements/disagreements with groups.¹ⁿ How much have we seen a Christian repeatedly do beautiful deeds for others, and then when such subjects came up, that same Christian is disdained? This is beyond thinking the Christian wrong; this is a negative sentiment about the quality of the Christian's virtue, character, and/or devotion. Scripture does not authorize or give merit to this unedifying activity. To assume worse or better Christian quality on the basis of denomination/`fellowship`/`brotherhood` distinctive tenets is to overvalue them.

Let us note Scripture on dealing with each other. Jesus said at John 13:35 "By this, shall all |people| know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (ASV|ESV|ASV). He did *NOT* say "By this shall all people know that ye are my disciples, if ye are right on all things that pertain to Scripture when ye assemble." Rather, the Lord said as He said.

Threats to the Health of Congregations

It is easy to blame theological liberalism for damage to Christian assembly, and it shares part of the blame. I see how it might be hard to convince someone to get up earlier than desired on Sunday or whatever day, make themselves presentable, travel, and spend an hour or so in church when it is taught that the primary source of Christian doctrine = the Bible is not `entirely true.' When so taught, the Christian who assembles with such congregations will be less inclined to believe s/he needs to follow everything in Scripture that seems distinctly religious. S/he may chose to not be inconvenienced by church assembly anywhere.

However, to the demerit of biblical conservatives, we share a part in this damage because theologically liberal Christians often see Scripture's priorities more clearly than we do. They do not believe all details of Scripture, but they usually believe and fully understand Scripture's teachings about how the Christian faith should affect good deeds done for people. Many of us are `busy defending the truth' -- which often means nothing more than showing ourselves `right' about congregation distinctives²ⁿ -- and treat any doubters of these tenets differently in a bad way. Based of these things, many violate Galatians 6:10 and treat some Christians less charitably than they treat non-Christians in attendance. What Christian would want be treated that way, or should want to see other Christians treated that way, especially when s/he can clearly read in Scripture that Christians should act differently? S/he might abandon assembly also, and it will be in part because congregation leaders neglect the weightiest principles taught in passages of Scripture.

Let us adopt both Bible authority **AND** Bible priorities.

¹ Rather than fight worldly matters entirely unfriendly to Christ's values, some choose lighter targets: persons who are already following Jesus Christ.

² Many `warriors for the Lord' are mainly focused on convincing everyone of their `superior rightness.' The cause for which they fight gratifies their lust for pride.

The letter presently called "Ephesians" was originally a general epistle¹ⁿ intended for all congregations of Christians. Ephesians 4:2-3 says "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love |; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996 | ASV). We are to be motivated by love to bear with each other's "faults," including rightness/wrongness, and "giving diligence" to do so upholding "peace." John 13:35 shows that the LORD Jesus Christ chose this to be a sign to identify His followers.

We saw Colossians 1:18 on how the collective of Jesus Christ's followers is the body of Christ. **He is NEVER shown preaching strife against other followers for religious tenets.** Scripture never teaches such conduct either. We should follow the New Testament-era church "precept | `Do not go beyond what is written'" (TCNT | TNIV) at 1 Corinthians 4:6. Given how we have seen:

1. at 2 Peter 3:16 that Scripture does have "things hard to understand" (NASB), and
2. that those with access to Scripture must "Give diligence" to be "handling aright the word of truth" (ASV) per 2 Timothy 2:15,

we cannot justify being charitable with each other over inferences of Scripture.

When we fight other members of the body of Christ, we are actually acting to hurt Jesus Christ Himself. Whatever we think, when we `roughhouse' other members of the body of Christ for congregational distinctives, whether right or not, we are *NOT* doing anything good for Jesus Christ. At Acts 9:4 Jesus asked a person troubling Christians "Why persecutest thou me" (ASV). We see that maltreating Christ's servants is maltreating Him.

When we maltreat and/or fight against other members of the body of Christ, we are acting to hurt Jesus Christ Himself.

Let us serve Jesus Christ by *first* treating well the *people* that compose His body,²ⁿ and let us submit to His Lordship by adopting HIS chosen tests for who are His disciples, including that at John 13:35. **Let us not spurn what He said to do for what He never said to do.** At Luke 6:46 Jesus said "And why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (ASV).

Let us note two passages that discuss overemphasizing less-important³ⁿ matters of religion:

Titus 3:8b-9 "I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto |people|; but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and |quarrels about the law; for they are unprofitable and worthless"

[ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV|ESV|ASV|ESV].

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

"Law" = Old Covenant Jewish worship code in Scripture, still approved for Jewish-Christians. If we treat harshly the body of Christ over disagreements irrelevant to good deeds, we sin. If we do so for our congregational distinctives, we act contrary to the Hebrews 10:24-5 purpose for even meeting.

¹ Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E., which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

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

² This particular essay was prompted by Disciple's Study Bible, page 1565 :

"People are too important to be hurt and rejected because they do not agree with us on a matter of interpretation. The major points of God's expectations are clear and should be followed. Otherwise, we need to agree to disagree."

Allow me to add that members of the body of Christ are GOD's people, and are too important to be ill-treated for these purposes, because doing this is doing so to the body of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, escalating conflict over a matter irrelevant to good works so that it hinders/precludes good works is against Titus 3:8-11, where "factious| people" (ASV|TNIV) overemphasize religious details "unprofitable" (ASV) to "good works" (ASV) and cause conflict. **We should agree to disagree before this.**

³ I did NOT say `unimportant.'

So how do we obey 1 Timothy 6:12a "Fight the good fight of the faith" (ASV)? The Greek word translated "fight" means "exert self intensely."¹ We are to fight hard within ourselves to hold ourselves to Christian conduct. Luke 12:51 warns of strife from non-Christians toward Christians, but Romans 12:18 says to Christians "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with |everyone" (NASB|TNIV), and Hebrews 12:14a says "Strive for peace with everyone" (ESV).

Why is a 1 Timothy 6:12a effort necessary to Christians? A list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) which is started at Galatians 5:19 includes *διχοστασια* "standing apart"² at 5:20; the desire to divide is part of our carnal nature, and we have to fight that. Ephesians 4:2-3 directs us as Christians to be "making allowances for each other's faults" doing so motivated by "love |; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996|ASV). Doing so *despite* disagreement is one way we "fight the good fight of the faith."

A Little Sermon

Over 2000 years ago, the Son of God left Heaven and came to this fallen sin-infested and misery-infested world to live life as a human being among a group of people who would reject Him. He strove to live a completely sinless life and died the most agonizing form of death His enemies could arrange for Him. At the end of this death, at *John 19:30* He uttered "Todo ha terminado" (NTV) = "All has-been finished." None of us alive in the natural universe was even conceived then. We had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the work of our redemption. Jesus Christ did ALL the work and paid the WHOLE price by Himself without any of us.

What is our role in securing our own salvations with our own actions? We proceed to *Romans 8:2-8* which has "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (TNIV) and

"The mind controlled by the sinful nature is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God. He refuses to obey God's law. And really he is not able to obey God's law. Those people who are ruled by their sinful selves cannot please God" (TNIV|ICB).

Before our regeneration, we cannot even please God. Our salvation at *Ephesians 2:8-10* is called "gift of God" and "not of works, lest any man should |boast himself" (KJV|GenB). Question is answered.

In *Part 4* of this study we examined how salvation is by biblical faith, which ought to be confirmed by specific actions within an overall life full of general acts of obedience and service to the Lord Jesus Christ. *Titus 2:14* says that Jesus Christ died "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works" (ASV). *Ephesians 2:8-10* has "for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may |boast himself. For |in Christ Jesus, God made us new people | unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (ESV|GenB|ICB|KJV). Before salvation, every person is utterly unable to do that which pleases God; after we are given the GIFT of salvation, we are made anew zealous to do what pleases God, and works follow from that. "Zealous" means we should be motivated by desire, not fear.

As we observe what Jesus Christ taught, we notice that He had very little to say about our lives in worship-specific settings. He taught mostly about how we conduct our overall, normal regular, general lives. At *Matthew 5-7*, Jesus gave the famous Sermon on the Mount, which was a sermon over that subject. The only mention of action in a public worship-specific setting is at *Matthew 5:23-4* "if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (NASB). All the rest is about our conduct away from such settings in normal, regular, overall life. To begin closing this sermon, Jesus goes from talking about false prophets to talking about people in general, and says at *Matthew 7:20-3*

¹ Translated from Stamps, *Biblia de Estudio Vida Plena*, page 1746 "esforzarse intensamente."

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

"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).

Let us note the "we spoke for you" part; these people enjoyed speaking on behalf of the Lord, but their overall lives did not involve following the Lord in the simple, non-worship-specific settings that He spent most of His ministry preaching on. These people are judged on these matters alone. There is no record in the New Testament of it ever being any different, and recall *1 Corinthians 4:6* "learn to observe the precept | 'Do not go beyond what is written.'" (TCNT|TNIV). We conclude that the Lord Jesus' judgment will be on how our faiths motivated conduct in our regular, overall lives.

Jesus established a church. Most of the members of this church meet in various localized congregations. This is commanded at *Hebrews 10:24-5*, and for a specific reason:

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

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live lives of love and doing good deeds of the type Jesus Christ taught us to do. Paul taught the same per *1 Corinthians 4:17* mentioning "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV).

After the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, during the New Testament church age, God through other biblical secretary-authors taught the same. *James 1:27* says that "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). *James 2:8* says "If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' |then you are doing right" (ESV|ICB). *Galatians 5:6* states "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, |but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB).

As Jesus Christ entered the agony of His excruciating death experience, He prayed 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 established a church of His believers, and its members were to meet with each other to encourage love and doing good deeds as He preached them.

Many in the church have reacted to this shamefully, and plagued it with these problems:

1. deficiencies in humility over salvation,
2. conceited overvalues of their own reckonings.¹ⁿ

Despite how the LORD Christ suffered for ALL His beloved followers, some people presume to do unkind deeds to some of His followers because those followers do not agree 'enough' with them.

Have we not seen from Scripture Jesus Christ did ALL the work and paid the WHOLE price all by Himself without any of us? We studied how we were incapable of even pleasing God before being given the GIFT of salvation. We studied *Ephesians 2:8-10* where salvation is called "gift of God" and "not of works, lest any man should |boast himself" (KJV|GenB). There are some who boast that their position before God is better than others based on

1. where they assemble, which is something that they as mortals do themselves, and
2. things with no real bearing on how Christians live outside the handful of hours per week of meetings?

Thought on this question should prompt at the very least some hesitation. After Jesus Christ did EVERYTHING for our redemption, and Scripture indicates that salvation is a GIFT for which we have no basis to boast, how dare so many of us boast as so – and over matters so trivial compared to what Jesus Christ valued most. Jesus Christ had much larger callings for His people, and those who set aside His highest values for our conduct because of loyalty to the matters of #2 should take heed.

¹ Some think that if one does not agree 'enough' with them about how to follow Christ, then s/he is not a Christian. Unwittingly, this is a presumptuous claim to Christ's status; for someone to be a Christian, the ONE Person s/he must agree with is Jesus Christ.

Too many of us think we are in a position to reject whom Jesus Christ accepted. Some boast 'we do not fellowship with error.' First, Christians are people, not beliefs. More importantly, Jesus Christ is Lord, and if we believe that, we should know that none of us is in a position to refuse to accept whom Jesus Christ accepted for eternal companionship. Jesus Christ bore that person's sins in the full wrath of God in place of that person, and did this so that s/he could be with Him forever; who are we to decide that we cannot genuinely accept that Christian? We need more humility among us in this matter.

Christians are people,
not beliefs.

Jesus Christ established a church of His believers, and He had an agenda for it. Per *Hebrews 10:24-5*, its members were to meet with each other to "stimulate each other to love and good deeds" (NASB) as He preached them. At *John 17:20-1* Jesus Christ prayed "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).

Too many think that we can only unite as church congregations to do what we exist for IF we agree on what should happen in each other's mutually separate worship sessions. While commonly assumed, Scripture nowhere teaches such a stipulation. *1 Corinthians 4:6* says "learn to observe the precept | 'Do not go beyond what is written.'" (TCNT|TNIV). Let us conclude that such an agreement-based stipulation for unity of church congregations violates this precept of Scripture.

Jesus Christ wished for us to be united for Him. Per *Hebrews 10:24-5*, our church congregations exist to "stimulate each other to love and good deeds" (NASB) that He desired for His followers to live out in their normal, regular, overall lives. The Scriptures warn us that it is our fleshly inclination to be divisive. At *Galatians 5:19-21* there is a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB), and at *Galatians 5:20*¹ in this list there is a Greek word διχοστασια² which literally means a "standing apart."³ In this sharp division, the people are completely dissociating from others by deliberate intention. Here, such activity is condemned.

Scripture calls us to a higher standard. *Galatians 5:6* says "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, |but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). For salvation, our faith must be one "that works through love." *Ephesians 1:1* KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.⁴ found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea, and was a forged addition; it was originally a circular epistle intended for all Christians with no specific audience, and would have covered all church congregations. "*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). We are to be "making allowances for each other's faults," including rightness/wrongness. We are to be "giving diligence" to maintain our unity against carnal divisive διχοστασια "standing apart"⁵ inclinations. Nowhere in Scripture is there a stipulation of mutual agreement to excuse ourselves from this high standard, and *1 Corinthians 4:6* says "learn to observe the precept | 'Do not go beyond what is written'" (TCNT|TNIV). Let us therefore conclude that we are called to be "giving diligence" to maintain our unity despite the challenge of not always agreeing with each other.

It is wrong to think unity among congregations of the church depends on everyone agreeing with any of us puny mortals.⁶ⁿ Who are any of us puny mortals to insist the church submit to an agenda dictated by anyone's reckonings? Who are any of us puny mortals to claim that unity in Jesus Christ's church depends on everyone agreeing with any of us? It is not our church. It is the LORD's church. It exists to serve the Lord Jesus Christ doing the good He taught. Let us humbly accept that.

¹ in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

² Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

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

⁴ Hodges, Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, page 582.

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

⁶ There is no difference whether this is done by a pope or by persons with other groups.

Summary –What It Comes Down to: Just Do As the Bible Says

Jesus Christ said "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (ASV) at *John* 12:26. He referred to His followers as "servants" (ASV) at *John* 18:36. He said at *John* 17:20-1 "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV)¹ⁿ; He wants His followers united in serving Him by enacting His teachings.

There are things that the Bible is explicit about. At 1 Corinthians 1:9-11 Paul wrote

"Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be knit together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are [quarrels] among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (ASV|BishB, GenB|NASB|ASV).

They were reprimanded for creating factions that quarreled over who had the best allegiance. Some of them boasted allegiance to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas = Peter, and some to Jesus Christ in self-exaltation over other Christians. If there is one good reason to do a deed that would otherwise be sin, allegiance to Christ would be it; it was not enough: ALL FOUR parties – including the party boasting allegiance to Christ – are here rebuked.²ⁿ They were told that such group divisions were not to continue: "NO divisions among you." It means precisely what it says, and it is to be followed.

This was one of those 1 Corinthians 4:17 "principles of behavior | in Christ" (NBV|ESV). Other Scripture is stronger about this; the strongest word translated "division" is διχοστασια literally "standing apart,"³ meaning acts of dissociation against others, and such is opposed in the church.

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). Even before this passage was written, Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church. *Galatians* 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery (ESV), then διχοστασια⁴ "standing apart"⁵ then "factions, envying, drunkenness, | orgies, and the like" (NASB|TNIV). This is a list of serious sins very carnal vices. Activity placed on this level of sin is not something Christians should assume normally permissible.

Unless Scripture specifically prescribes such activity, it should be assumed unacceptable. Matthew 18:15-7 prescribes such when one church person sins directly against another church person, and will neither stop nor make amends. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 prescribes withdrawal from any "brother who leads an unruly life" (NASB). 1 Corinthians 5:11 specifies we "must not associate with any who claim to be fellow believers but are sexually immoral or greedy, idolaters or slanderers, drunkards or swindlers" (TNIV). These are cases where individual church people are behaving unjustly against other church people or are in grave carnality. In all other situations, we should assume that the Bible's prohibitions against dividing from other Christians are to be followed.

There is another case where the Bible tells us to divide. Romans 16:17 has "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV). Greek translated "divisions" is διχοστασια literally means "standing apart,"⁶ and refers to acts of disassociation against others. Christians are to stay away from church people who try to cause Christians to dissociate.

¹ He did NOT say 'may all be in one organization' or 'may all agree on religious details.' We do NOT need to haggle over organization mergers, and we do NOT need to come to a consensus over questions that did not exist until centuries after Jesus Christ.

² **Their loyalty to Christ was right -- but what they did for it was not. There are wrong ways to promote right things.**

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

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

Titus 3:10-1 teaches the same: "A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" (ASV). A "factious man"¹ⁿ is someone who likes factions. It is no more complicated than that: if a person likes factions so much s/he will not stop seeking them, s/he is so "perverted" we are to keep a distance.

There should be no mistake that factiousness is never acceptable. ***There is not so much as a single instance of Scripture where we are directed to divide from groups of Christians.*** Because of this truth, we can see that the commands of Scripture against factiousness are binding in all situations. ***We are NEVER permitted to divide against groups of Christians.***

There are certain instances of Scripture where division was occurring and Scripture shows it was not to be occurring. *Romans* 14:1-13a has

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians disagreed with each other over several religious details, and that this was expected to continue unopposed. In regards to these religious disagreements, there was more than just disagreeing or expressing disagreement: there was "censure" happening. This means that because of these disagreements, there were people in the congregation treating Christians as if those Christians were bad. People among the congregation at Rome did more than "censure" regarding these disagreements; they were also prone to presume to decide what Christians were 'acceptable' or not. We see the latter in *Romans* 15:5-7, which says:

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

This passage urges that, despite the religious disagreements listed in *Romans* 14:1-13, those Christians were to be in "harmony with one another" and to "accept one another."²ⁿ Still, not only was censuring happening along with deeming Christians 'unacceptable,' but so also was διχοστασια literally "standing apart."³ *Romans* 16:17 speaks against people participating in 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). ***Religious disagreements are NOT a permissible reason to divide within the church.*** It does not matter if our opinions say there ought to be exceptions – *Romans* 14:1-13a + 15:5-7 + 16:17 are clear about this, and ***what the Bible teaches, goes.***

¹ 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.

² This does not mean we cannot think someone is wrong nor say that someone is wrong. However, we cannot presume that a Christian is 'unacceptable' to us because of real or perceived 'wrongness.'

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

To have unity within the church as we are supposed to, we need to simply DO as the Bible says. We need to resist lust toward factiousness as we would resist lust toward any other sin.

Likewise, we should seek after unity. *Colossians 3:12-4* says:

"Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is [the perfect bond of unity]" (ASV|ESV|ASV|NASB).

Greek translated "forbearing one another" is also translated "put up with one another" (PEB). *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). If we would simply DO as these passages say, church unity would follow.

Conclusion 1: Go Back to the Beginning – Jesus Christ

The seeds for church division were already rife in the New Testament era. To see and remedy what came to fruition as large-scale church division, we need only study the New Testament.

At Matthew 16:15-8, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples Who people were saying that He is:

"`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" transliterates 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.²ⁿ Πέτρος means "small stone" and πέτρα means "foundation boulder."³ Jesus said He would build "my church" on the πέτρα, what had just been said: "'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" English "church" translates εκκλησια, used in Greek culture about the community of followers of Pythagoras,⁴ and parallel to how Christians are followers of Christ. "Christians" renames "disciples," per Acts 11:26 "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁵ He began His church at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB).

This community of followers of Jesus Christ was to assemble together physically locally.⁶ⁿ Hebrews 10:24-5 tells the purpose of such assembly:

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

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 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.

³ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, page 1423.

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

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

⁶ Many people assume Christ gave His disciples unrecorded instructions detailing a universal congregation meeting pattern. This has no support in Scripture. Further, the written Word of God is very scant in attention to details of congregation meetings.

Per Hebrews 10:24-5 just quoted, the purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds, which are things Jesus Christ taught during His earthly ministry.¹ⁿ The purpose is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly,²ⁿ and then repeated afterward. Those congregations should not forget that they meet within the community of Jesus Christ's followers, which exists to follow His teachings.

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). This was to be in the community of Jesus Christ's followers, which exists to follow His teachings.

If we want to see how to DO this, we need to use Scripture. Scripture was given to tell us all we need to know about what we need to DO as Christians. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrinel, 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

Being Christian Is Not 'Going to Church': Notions to the contrary are common to both unbelievers and believers.

Fact: a group of atheist biblical scholars can construct a 'church service' from the New Testament and do it weekly. They would still be non-Christians. Christian unity is not to be based on something people can do without being Christians.

An unbeliever cannot imitate a resolve to live according to Christ's teachings, which were about daily life. Being a follower of His teachings is being Christian.

What Scripture Would Be Clear About: Many people think Scripture is 'clear' about religious opinions that people 'should have.' However, when it comes to

1) Scripture's standards of how to treat people, and
2) treating people accordingly despite disagreement, they claim 'It is not that simple.' The purpose of Scripture is to guide what we **do**. Scripture will be clear and thorough on this subject. We should take Scripture at face value on this.

This passage tells us good uses for Scripture, but tells us that it was given so that "the person who serves God" could be "entirely instructed for all good work." Its purpose is to enable us to be "entirely instructed" in what God wants us to DO. It enables us to be "entirely instructed" to know what God wants us to DO - including what to DO to stay united.

Topic #1 of 3: The Barriers We Have to Cross

After Jesus Christ established His church, which was to be the community of His followers, there are four sins that are closely related in the problem of division in the church:

- Pride/self/exaltation/lack of humility;
- Idolatry;
- Desire for strife;
- Desire to divide into factions.

Seeds for church division were already rife in the New Testament era; we can study them in Scripture.

Jesus closes a list at Mark 7:21-3 with "...pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (ASV). "Pride" as self-exaltation and lack of humility is called "evil." Such self-exaltation and lack of humility leads people to want to 'explore and find new truths,' leading to speculations. 1 Timothy 1:5-6 has "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). Proverbs 13:10 says "Among the proude there is euer strife" (BishB). This is because many of the proud strive against anyone who presents even a possible threat to potential perception of their 'superior rightness.' Proverbs 17:19 says "Whoever loves to quarrel loves to sin" (ICB); Hebrew underneath "to quarrel" is also translated "strife" (ASV, JPS 1985, others) and this refers to hostile arguments. Speculation motivated by pride leads to quarreling.

¹ There is no hint in Scripture that these had any special temple ceremony-type sacredness, nor a hint of special status above or distinct from regular life.

² Any congregation that neglects this task fails in its divinely-appointed reason to exist. This is true regardless of the accuracy of its precepts during assembly.

Also, if a Christian has any congregation accessible which takes care to its Hebrews 10:24-5 purpose, 'go nowhere' is not an option -- regardless of its accuracy.

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

Pride-motivated speculation leads to more than strife-quarreling. It also leads to idolatrous behavior. Titus 3:8b-9a instructs "that they who have believed God may be careful to |devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" called "unprofitable and vain."¹ Colossians 3:5 describes "greediness, which is idolatry" (NBV). Devotion to things above God's will is idolatry; religious devotion to things is idolatry. 2 Peter 1:1 names "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV). Pride in religious tenets has led to religious servitude to them and in making them 'must have' definers of faith with equal or greater importance than Christ - hence, idols.²ⁿ Pride-motivated desire to be agreed with causes hostile quarrels; personal contempt over disagreement causes setting aside God's priority of good deeds.³ⁿ For some people not to set aside the Lord's will of good deeds in the Lord's church, they insist that Christians adopt their teachings 'about what Christ wants' in addition to Christ's. Besides idolatrous conduct, this is pride.⁴ⁿ Isaiah 14:12-15 addresses someone who thought "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917): Satan. While most people who are guilty are not as willful, the lesson applies.

Speculation motivated by pride leads also to divisions. Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that begins "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and διχοστασια,⁵ and ends "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια is "standing apart,"⁶ meaning acts of dissociation. Some people want to 'stand with' only Christians who affirm their 'rightness.' We reach the crux of the problem, illustrated at Titus 3:8-11:

"Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God may be careful to |devote themselves to good works.| These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" [ASV|ESV|ASV].

The "law" = first five books of Scripture. Christians should focus on "good deeds" (RSV 1952; NLT 1996). The "factious man"⁷ⁿ is someone seeking factions⁸ⁿ rallied off-task on "unprofitable" disputes.

¹ ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV.

² People who oppose servants of Christ for religious precepts are especially affected.

³ Some people involve Scripture in such things. They claim 'I am just teaching the truth from Scripture' while they indulge in speaking with unkind intent. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV) to make us "enteramente instruído" (RVR 1909) = "entirely instructed" "unto all good works" (KJV).

In light of this, we see that **ABUSING SCRIPTURE BY USING IT AS A PRETENSE TO ACT ON MALICE IS TO DESECRATE SCRIPTURE**. Ephesians 4:31 says to "put away" "all malice" (ASV). Even if right, if someone resolves to be malicious, s/he should keep the Bible out of it.

⁴ History is full of church groups that crusaded over legitimate 'rediscoveries' and got stunted growth and development.* There is no reason for God to reward people for such adoration of their religious tenets that they set aside His will of church harmony.

*DeGroot, *The Restoration Principle*, page 7.

⁵ Pointed out in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

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

⁷ The King James Version uses the word "heretick" here. Disjoint from common church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for 'disliked view' or 'religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."* It also means "choosing."[†] This is intentional choice, not mistake. In the church, this is making factional parties of whatever type based on chosen preference.

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

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

⁸ Congregations get misused as factions. Related to this, many evaluate Christians mainly on whom they assemble with. If a person meets with a 'right group' s/he is assumed a 'better Christian,' and those that meet in a 'wrong group' are all assumed 'less faithful' -- without regard to how they follow Jesus Christ in overall life. Jesus Christ at Matthew 5-7 gave us a large sample of documented teachings, and at 7:20 began prescribing a **valid** test: "you will know people by the deeds they do" (NBV).

When these tendencies combined as they did, and grew, we saw centuries of division in the church. Even up to the 1900's, most Christians could not conceive of church unity without agreement over large groups of religious details. To restore the ancient unity, we must get back beyond this.

Topic #2 of 3: The Problems Playing Out in Scripture

Now it is time to discuss specific cases in Scripture where these problem urges played out in the church. At 1 Timothy 1:5-6 Paul wrote "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).¹ⁿ At 1 Timothy 6:3-4a he had more to say about this situation:

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

Greek under "does not adhere to" is negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."² The problem with the teaching is just that it is alien to what Jesus Christ taught "words" about and irrelevant to "godly life." People guilty were disapproved of strongly. Titus 3:8-11 discusses the same problem:

"Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God may be careful to [devote themselves to good works.] These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" [ASV|ESV|ASV].

The "law" is the first five books of Scripture. Here at Titus 3:8-11, Paul was stating that Christians should carefully adhere to focusing on "good deeds" (RSV 1952; NLT 1996). The "factious man"³ⁿ is a person creating divisions by focusing on "unprofitable" distractions of "foolish questionings." Here, factiousness was caused by taking speculations too far. Those guilty are disapproved of strongly.

The epistle to the Romans shows a similar problem. We start with Romans 14:1-13a

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians disagreed with each other over several religious details. He told them to accept the existence of these differences in thought over religious details.

¹ Misusing Scripture by involving it in prohibited "fruitless discussion" does not change "fruitless discussion" into anything better. It simply adds to the wrong.

² in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

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

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

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

There is more to this text. Romans 14:1-13a has within it "Who are you to censure the servant of another" and "let us no longer censure one another." In regards to the religious disagreements, there was more than just disagreeing or expressing disagreement: there was censuring.

There were those who presumed to censure those who did not agree with their opinions on religious details. They did more than censure; they were also prone to presume to decide what Christians were 'acceptable' to them or not. We see the latter in Romans 15:5-7, which says:

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

This passage urges that, despite the disagreements listed in Romans 14:1-13, those Christians are to be in "harmony with one another" and are to "accept one another."¹ⁿ They were directed to do the latter at Romans 15:7, as it says "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

Romans 16:17b gives more information: "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV). Greek under "divisions" is διχοστασια "standing apart,"² meaning acts of disassociation. Such acts were happening, and such behavior was "contrary to what you have been taught."

Paul did not tell them of common opinions to have over these religious details, nor did he tell them to come to common opinions. Paul told them to accept existence of these differences in thought over religious details. Paul told them "accept one other" at Romans 15:5-7 (NASB). Paul indicated that acts of dissociation were "contrary to what you have been taught" (NBV) at Romans 16:17. They were taught not to do this before. Paul demanded action against those doing this. In Romans 14:1-13 he rebuked them "why do you regard your brother with contempt" (NASB) and closed with "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV). These passages addressed and forbade contempt-motivated censures and dissociations over religious disagreement.

'But We Are Right': Scripture prohibits acts of dividing in the church time and again. Many church people do it anyway, presuming that 'rightness/'wrongness' provides an exemption.

Further, as they so do this, some presume that not only is the Lord okay with their action, but that He is actually pleased by their action! Truth: doing what the Lord expressly prohibited is not likely to please Him.

Related: An 'accurate' faction is still a faction.

We now turn to a situation where pride 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 Diotrephes, who loves to |have the pre-eminence among them|, does not accept our authority" (TNIV|ABUV|NBV). 3 John verse 10 has "he refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church" (TNIV). Here 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 the nature of Diotrephes's factiousness: it went beyond this to "unjustly accusing us with wicked words" (NASB).³ⁿ 3 John 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 associated Diotrephes's factiousness with what it was: "evil."

¹ Again, this does not mean we cannot think someone is wrong nor say so.

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

³ The association between these deeds and factiousness here in Scripture suggests why it seems more common in highly-factious groups to slander with false accusations

- 1) outside groups and individuals within outside groups,
- 2) those of their own group whom they decide do not agree 'enough' with them,
- 3) those of their own group who seem to have any agreement with any outside group,
- 4) those of their own group who are not factious against all outside groups,
- 5) those of their own group who favor any civility toward people of outside groups.

Those who indulge in factious lust ought to beware that other sins may come too.

For centuries, we have seen all this in the church. We have seen church people speculate on matters irrelevant to simple Christian faith, godly life, and good deeds – and then insist on agreement. Their insistence upon agreement in off-task speculation leads them to accept only Christians who do so, and to pressure other Christians to do likewise. Large-scale factiousness has resulted.

Topic #3 of 3: Applying Scripture's Principles on These Situations

Now we turn to how to return to church unity. We start at 1 Corinthians 12, which describes the church as a body and makes illustrations. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (ESV). 1 Corinthians 12:21 says "And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (ASV). 1 Corinthians 12:25 has "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another" (ESV). All Christians are in the body of Christ. We cannot rightly claim of any Christians that we have no need of them. We should not care more for some parts of the church and less for others – "same care for one another."

A Side Note About Paul: He Was Very Much Jesus-First

Paul wrote at Philippians 1:15-8a

"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but |thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? |The important thing is that in every way, whether for right or wrong reasons,| Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice" (ESV|NASB|NCV|ESV).

Paul had no objection that people were preaching Jesus Christ out of enmity to Paul, because they were doing what was most important to him: they were promoting Jesus Christ. Paul did not approve of the "wrong reasons" – but he put Jesus Christ first. Let us all do likewise.

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

"seeing that ye have put off [the old self with its practices] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator; where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is [the perfect bond of unity]" (ASV|ESV|NASB).¹ⁿ

Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians:

At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "'Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24. However, Acts 21:25a says "We have already sent a letter to the non-Jewish believers" (NCV) and then refers back to Acts 15:19-30 where they told non-Jews that they were not bound by the Judaic Law.

Jewish Christians continued to follow the Law but did not expect Gentile Christians to do so. Gentile Christians as a norm did not do so. This was a difference in religion.

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

Colossians 3:9-14 shows that social barriers common in the New Testament era were not to be relevant in Christ. As Jews who became Christians continued to worship as Jews, this included a religious barrier: Jew and non-Jew. Despite religious differences between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, there was equality of the groups as far as their standings as Christians. Despite that they worshipped differently, they were expected to maintain "the perfect bond of unity."

¹ This passage says "if any man have a complaint against any" we are to forgive. This includes any complaint about how others serve the Lord, which really is the Lord's business only -- not ours. The Lord may or may not be displeased by how 'they' serve Him, but we can be sure **we do not please God by treating any follower of Christ as if s/he is against God.** If a person is a follower of Christ, then s/he fulfills 'the biggie' to please God.

Despite religious differences between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, it was not said that one group 'is better than the other' because of how it worshipped. Per Colossians 3:9-14, they were to maintain "the perfect bond of unity" (NASB). That principle applies always: we are not authorized to set up a class system among us¹ⁿ *even for religious differences*.

We return to the book of Romans and a situation it addressed. Romans 14:1-13a says:

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

Romans 14:1-13a shows that Christians of that time disagreed with each other over several religious details. The passage told them to accept these differences in religious thought without "censure."

¹ An example of 'classes of Christians' thinking is this claim related to baptism and to church procedure by a member of the factious portions of the Restoration Movement:

"The movement has been opposed, however, from its beginning, to the practice of recognizing as fully Christian any but those who have met the scriptural requirements for bearing that name, or as completely Christian churches any but those that meet the pattern set forth in the New Testament."*

Before we proceed, a historical correction is needed: the first church congregations of the Restoration accepted unimmersed Christians into membership.** Some of those congregations even had people who believed the Quaker view and had never received 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.†

In response to the sentiment of the excerpt, there is no such thing as 'not fully Christian.' A person is either a Christian or s/he is not. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44^{††} 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 those in Christ's 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. 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."^{†††} Regardless of shortcomings, if a person believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings, then s/he is a Christian; if s/he is a Christian, then s/he must be "fully" recognized as Christian.

A "completely Christian" congregation is one that is 100% Christian in composition. In Scripture, a church congregation is simply a group of Christians who meet together. Procedures never make a church, so there is no authority to claim that a congregation becomes less "completely Christian" based on its procedures.

* Ford, A History of the Restoration Plea, page 171.

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

^* Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, page 119.

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

† Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, page 120.

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

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

In regards to the religious disagreements, there was more than just disagreeing or expressing disagreement: there was censuring.¹ⁿ Romans 14:1-13a has within it "Who art thou | to censure another's servant?" (ASV | NBV) and "let us no longer censure one another" (NASB).

There were those who presumed to such pride that they dared to censure those who did not agree with their opinions over religious details. They did more than censure; they were also prone to presume to decide what Christians were 'acceptable' to them or not.

We see the latter in Romans 15:5-7, which says:

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

This passage urges that despite the disagreements of Romans 14:1-13, those Christians live in "harmony with one another" and "accept one another."

Romans 16:17b gives more information: "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV). Greek translated "divisions" is διχοστασια "standing apart."² These are acts of disassociation. People were causing these sins of disassociation. The disagreements of Romans 14:1-13 were causing people to "censure" (NBV) others and also to sins of disassociation.

Paul did not tell them of common views to have over these, and he did not tell them to come to common opinions. He told them to accept without "censure" these differences in thought over religious details. Paul told them "accept one other." Paul indicated that causing acts of dissociation were "contrary to what you have been taught," and called for repercussions against those responsible for these at Romans 16:17. In Romans 14:1-13a he rebuked them "why do you regard your brother with contempt" (NASB) and

'But...': Throughout the centuries, church people have been very good at making factious conduct seem okay or even good.

When it comes right down to it, the Bible forbids all such conduct in the church. Pious-sounding language does not change that. Opinions that 'make sense' do not change that.

The Bible prohibits this conduct in the church and gives no exemptions.

Common Misperception Corrected:
Telling Christians what to believe and do 'so that we can accept unity with them' is not seeking unity. Rather, it is simply a refusal to refrain from factiousness.

¹ Many modern church people justify punitive attacks on other Christian groups for religious tenets by alleging that the religious tenets are from a lack of piety. The claim is that people have these religious tenets because of preference, and do not care much what Jesus Christ would want. This makes them feel justified in treating Christians they disagree with as defective Christians. We will correct this here.

Matthew 7:20 explains that we will know His followers as so: "Similarly, you will know people by the deeds they do" (NBV) -- **NOT** 'by their religious opinions' and **NOT** 'by whom they assemble with.' He prescribed how we are to recognize His followers.

Most group religious tenets Christians disagree over have no relevance to what they actually do in overall life. One would think that if Christians were really adopting group religious tenets out of desires to do whatever they want, it would show in regular life. Life away from assembly and out in the world involves enticements to do sins which Scripture unambiguously describes as sin. If Christians were adopting group religious tenets out of desire to please themselves, there should be a very noticeable difference in levels of godly living between the groups.

However, we usually have to be informed about a Christian's group affiliation to know the difference; otherwise, we generally do not know. We do not typically know what group a Christian assembles with based upon level of godliness in regular life.

The reason for this should be obvious: varying religious tenets are not due to differences in Christian fidelity. Rather, those varying religious tenets are believed because they are actually thought to be true by Christians who hold them.

This eliminates the basis for censuring other Christians for their religious tenets. The directives in Romans 14:1-13a, 15:5-7, and 16:17 are therefore binding.
² Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

closed with "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV). Romans 14:1-13a put a moratorium on contempt-motivated censures over religious disagreement – let alone the disassociation-divisions.

The above is what we need to do to get away from these prohibited behaviors. There are other things we need to do in order to stay away from such behaviors.

1 Timothy and Titus discuss a similar situation. At 1 Timothy 1:5-6 we see "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). Titus 3:8-11 says:

"Faithful is the saying, and concerning these things I desire that thou affirm confidently, to the end that they who have believed God may be careful to [devote themselves to good works.] These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" [ASV|ESV|ASV].

The "law" is the first five books of Scripture, the Old Testament Judaic Law, which was mainly about ceremonial worship. Paul was stating that Christians should carefully adhere to focusing on "good deeds" (RSV 1952; NLT 1996). The "factious man"¹ⁿ is a person intent on creating divisions by focusing on "unprofitable" distractions of "foolish questionings." The "foolish questionings" were "unprofitable" because they were not related to "good deeds." 1 Timothy 6:3-4a says

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

Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."² The problem with the disapproved teaching is merely that it is "different" from teaching about "godly

Paul and Jesus: Many people think that the words of Paul and other apostles are "meat" for "mature" Christians, and focus on them. As we can see, the apostle Paul insisted that Christians focus on the "words" of Jesus Christ. This is a specific of Acts 2:42 "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV).

life" and "words" of "our Lord Jesus Christ." Accuracy is irrelevant. If a person is focused off-topic, s/he "is conceited and understands nothing." The doctrine we teach should be about *what Jesus Christ is documented to have actually spoke*.

Paul taught the same things that Jesus Christ taught: at 1 Corinthians 4:17 he mentioned "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV). He alluded to doing this at Acts 20:35 when he said "In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (ASV). They were to "remember" this teaching of Jesus, something he had "gave you an example" to help them to "remember" that saying. This is a recollection of something he had done in teaching them. Per 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul had "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV).

Paul was an apostle. 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). One apostle, Paul, gives specifics of Acts 2:42 "apostles' | doctrine" (KJV, NKJV) and tells us what he called "sound doctrine" at 1 Timothy 1:3-10

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

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

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

² in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

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

1 Timothy 1:3-10 has simple matters of overall living. 1 Corinthians 4:17 refers to "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere" (NBV | ESV). The "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV) of Acts 2:42 was over these subjects.

Paul, Peter, John and Jesus: Many people think that the words of apostles are "meat" for "mature" Christians, and focus on them. These apostles would not have wanted Christians to treat their words as more important than the words of their Master Jesus Christ. The "apostles' doctrine" pointed Christians to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Paul said at 1 Timothy 1:5-6 "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB). 2 Corinthians 11:3 refers to "the **simplicity** and the purity that is toward Christ" (ASV). To be a healthy Christian, all that is needed are things that befit "simplicity." What the apostles were teaching was simple.

Paul mentioned at 1 Corinthians 4:17 "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV | ESV). At 1 Corinthians 11:2 Paul said to the Corinthians "I praise you that ye remember me in all things, and hold | firmly | the traditions, even as I delivered them to you" (ASV|NASB|ASV). At 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul instructed the Thessalonians to abide by the "traditions you were taught" (HCSB), and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 has a specific:

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

The "tradition" is that we not live undisciplined lives. It was about regular living, just like what Paul called "sound doctrine" at 1 Timothy 1:3-10. The word "traditions" in Judaism referred to passing onward of instruction from earlier teachers, so in Paul's writings, this would refer to Jesus Christ's teachings.¹ We can find those teachings in the four gospels and Acts 20:35. As Paul was passing on "traditions," he was passing on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

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

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, the church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (NKJV). The "apostles' doctrine" kept unity in the church throughout the New Testament era² - and here the apostles would have been obeying what Jesus Christ had told them at Matthew 28:20a "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NCV). The Acts 2:42 "apostles' doctrine" would have been Christ's teachings found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

¹ In Blackaby, et al, The Blackaby Study Bible, page 1435.

² Noted by Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ, page 13.

Christ never said He wanted us to be in one organization or to share opinions on a plethora of religious details. At Matthew 16:18 He said "I will build My church" (NBV).¹ⁿ "Church" translates εκκλησια, used in Greek culture about the community of followers of Pythagoras,² just as Christians are followers of Christ. Per Acts 11:26, Christians are "disciples": "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."³ At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ ordained His community of people who would follow His teachings. When He said at John 17:20-1a "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV), He wanted us united in following His teachings.

We cannot expect church unity on premises foreign to Scripture. In Scripture, church unity is not based on common religious procedure or agreement over a plethora of distinctly-religious tenets. Expecting agreement over these things is what caused church division in the first place. The cause of church division is not the solution for church division, and Scripture warned against those causes.

2 Corinthians 11:3 refers to "the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (ASV). To be a united church of Jesus Christ, we need not come to a consensus over a plethora of distinctly-religious tenets, get people to drop bunches of valued beliefs, nor call everyone 'right.' We need not come to a consensus over disputes that did not begin until centuries after the New Testament era,⁴ⁿ nor merge all denominations into a single denomination, nor abandon our denominations to join a whole new denomination. We do not need to agree on a set of matching congregation governance systems and assembly-time procedures. Church unity in the Bible is much simpler and more meaningful than this.

Julian Olyn Hunt proposed unity in a name: "Christian."⁵ At Matthew 16:18 Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). "Church" usually translates Greek εκκλησια, which was used in ancient Greek culture about the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁶ This parallels how Christians are

World Church Growth as of c. 2000: Five Third World countries' Christian populations are projected to pass 100 million with the U.S.'s at 330 million by 2050.⁷ Groups there often understand the Bible and worship in ways foreign to most U.S. Christians. Those groups are expected to get greater influence in the northern hemisphere and the West.⁸

Islam is a fast-spreading world religion, but in Islamic countries, Messianic mosques are forming where Jesus Christ is worshiped as He is – and using Islamic practices.⁹ Such practice is foreign to outside Christians.

For functional unity to happen, we will need to forsake the human tradition of agreement-focused factiousness.

¹ In the 1880-1910 United States, a group of new denominations that focus on Jesus formed that includes the Evangelical Covenant Church and Evangelical Free Church,* which have minimal insisted-on distinct tenets besides Bible belief. These two are in a set of denominations which is the fastest growing in the U.S.* as of c. 2000.

A c. 2000 study of U.S. unbelievers reports that they often see Christians as not representing Jesus.^* One minister who extensively interviewed unbelievers reports this: to be more open to the church, they want the church to teach about Jesus more.^† We should not be focusing on our own inferences, opinions, and teachings of 'what Christ would want taught.' If we do not treat Christ's church like it is HIS church -- NOT 'His and ours' -- we will not draw people to Him and His teachings.

* D. Olson, The American Church in Crisis, pages 187, 236 and page 102 respectively.

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

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

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 There is no way Scriptural unity can hinge on consensus over disputes from centuries after Scripture. Any basis for unity alien to Scripture cannot be Scriptural unity.

⁵ Hunt, Christian Is the Name of the Church, page 322.

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

⁷ Jenkins, The Next Christendom, page 90.

⁸ Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South, page 14.

⁹ Essay by Shah Ali with J. Dudley Woodberry in Winter, Hawthorne, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader, pages D-142 to D-143.

followers of Jesus Christ. Before Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples": "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB); μαθητας is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."¹ In Jesus Christ's usage of εκκλησια at Matthew 16:18, He was ordaining His community of people who follow His teachings. Therefore, when He prayed 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), He wanted that community of His followers to be united in following His teachings. Therefore, let us resolve to be exactly that.

Conclusion 2: We Need to Do Our Job

At *Matthew 16:15-8*, Jesus Christ was talking with His disciples; we pick up:

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

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.²ⁿ "Peter" is Πητρος and "rock" is πετρα. Πητρος means "a small stone" and πετρα means "a foundation boulder."³ Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πετρα. The πετρα was what was discussed immediately before: "'You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.'" This is the premise of what the church is built upon: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.⁴ⁿ He said that He would build His εκκλησιαν translated "church" form of εκκλησια we will discuss soon.

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"⁵ⁿ - He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. Jesus Christ expected His followers to follow and perpetuate⁶ⁿ what He had taught in all four gospels and Acts 20:35.

Per *Acts 11:26*, Christians were originally called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is translated "followers" in the ICB at Acts 11:26; μαθητας is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁷ The word usually translated "church" is εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly to discuss the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁸ Jesus Christ intended to have a community of His followers. That community of followers would be the church, and members thereof would follow His teachings.

¹ Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

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

³ MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

⁴ Alexander Campbell called for the substitution of "UNITY OF FAITH, for unity of opinion" and that the unity of this faith would be "The one fact is expressed in a single proposition - that Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah."

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

⁵ Notions that Jesus Christ's preachings were to cease relevance and/or priority after His few-year earthly ministry are contrary to both good reason and this passage.

⁶ We should be careful about promoting His teachings via methods He did not teach -- especially in secular activities. If a method He did not teach discords with His teachings, hurts people, or makes people less receptive to Him, it should not be used.

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

⁸ Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

At *Matthew 28:19-20*, Christ told His apostles to "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NCV) and they did so. Per *Acts 2:42*, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in it "continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine" (NKJV). The "apostles' doctrine" would have simply been what Christ 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) – Paul alluded to this at *Acts 20:35*. These "principles of behavior in Christ" would have been the life principles which Christ is documented teaching in all four gospels and *Acts 20:35*. That is simply "the apostles' doctrine" which was taught "everywhere in every church."¹ⁿ

Jesus Christ said "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (ASV) at *John 12:26*. He referred to His followers as "my servants" (ASV) at *John 18:36*. *Colossians 3:24* says "ye serve the Lord Christ" (ASV). Our task as Christians is to be followers of Him and thereby serve Him.

Recall that the church is simply the community of Jesus Christ's followers/servants. Congregations are local portions of the community of Jesus Christ's followers which meet together. Christians are to assemble as reasonably possible,²ⁿ as *Hebrews 10:24-5* urges and states its purpose:

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

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live Christian lives of love and good deeds,³ⁿ which are things Jesus Christ taught during His entire earthly ministry. The purpose is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly, and then repeated afterward.

Paul was concerned that people connected to the church would want to go into areas that Christ never addressed. At *1 Timothy 6:3-4a* Paul 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).

Greek under "does not adhere to" is the negation of *προσερχομαι* strictly "draw near,"⁴ meaning the rebuked "different doctrine" does not stay close to "sound words" of Jesus or "godly life." The issue with the "different doctrine" is just that it differs; accuracy or not is irrelevant. We should not be delving off into areas away from "godly life" and what Jesus Christ is documented speaking about. The doctrine we teach should be about godly living and about what Jesus Christ actually spoke.⁵ⁿ

Paul reports at *1 Timothy 1:5* "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB). He reports at *Titus 3:8* "I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have |believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds"⁶ – this theme is exactly what Jesus Christ is documented teaching throughout His earthly ministry.

Jesus Christ referred to His followers as "my servants" (ASV) at *John 18:36*. His followers should serve Him. One thing He said: *John 17:20-1* "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); He wants His followers united in serving Him. To serve Him, we should follow what He said He wants.

¹ The "apostles' doctrine" is what maintained unity in the New Testament-era church. --Noted by Holloway, Foster, *Renewing God's People*, page 13.

² The "returning" (ASV) Ethiopian official of *Acts 8:26-39* after conversion "went joyfully on his way" (NBV) to Ethiopia away from all congregations. Because his regular life had him returning to a region far from the church's main expansion, he would not have assembled for at least the time being. This was fine.

³ Church assembly is not the bulk of a Christian's obligations. To the contrary: it is a supporting part, and is but a small percentage of a Christian's 24x7=168-hour work week.

⁴ in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1257.

⁵ It is tragic how many people would have Jesus Christ's church divided over subjects which He is not recorded saying one thing about. This passage points us otherwise.

⁶ ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952.

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, | wraths, | selfish ambition" (ESV|ASV|TNIV), then διχοστασια¹ "standing apart"² then "factions, envying, drunkenness, | orgies, and the like" (NASB|TNIV). This is a list of very carnal vices. *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). Even before this passage was written, Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church. Activity placed of this level of carnality is not something Christians should assume is normally permissible. Unless confronted with a precise match with scenarios where Scripture says such activity is to be done,³ⁿ it should be assumed unacceptable.

Titus 3:10-1 says "A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" (ASV). A "factious man"⁴ⁿ is someone who likes factions. It is no more complicated than that. There is no instance of Scripture where we are directed to divide from groups of Christians. Because of this truth, we can see that the commands of Scripture against factiousness are binding in all situations. We are never permitted to divide against groups of Christians.

Rather than do what Scripture teaches against, let us do as Scripture says. *Romans 15:5-7* says:

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

This passage urges that, despite the religious disagreements listed in *Romans 14:1-13*, those Christians were to be in "harmony with one another" and to "accept one another." *Colossians 3:12-4* says to be "forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is | the perfect bond of unity" (ASV|ESV|ASV|NASB). Greek translated "forbearing one another" is also translated "put up with one another" (PEB). *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). Let us simply do as these passages say.

Per *Acts 11:26*, Christians were originally called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is translated "followers" in the ICB at *Acts 11:26*; μαθητας is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."⁵ The word usually translated "church" is εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly to discuss the community of followers of Pythagoras.⁶ Jesus Christ intended to have a community of His followers. That community of followers would be the church, and members thereof would follow His teachings. Jesus Christ said "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (ASV) at *John 12:26*. He referred to His followers as "my servants" (ASV) at *John 18:36*. The church is to be a community of servants to Him.

We have seen how εκκλησια "church" meant a community of disciples; it has another relevant meaning. In the Greek Old Testament translation Septuagint, εκκλησια was used for the "gathering" of Israel,⁷ God's Old Covenant people. God's New Covenant εκκλησια is likewise a gathering of God's people, gathered *together* for His purposes – we should act *together* accordingly.

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 Matthew 18:15-7, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 1 Corinthians 5:11 are such cases.

⁴ 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.

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

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

⁷ Vine et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 42 NT.

As the Lord's church, we have a job to do.¹ⁿ The purpose for which we were established was made clear in advance by the Founder and Builder Himself. Our appointed priorities have been made clear. We should be putting our appointed job first, and rallied together doing that job.

Our job is to follow and perpetuate Jesus Christ's teachings. One of the most important things to *DO* for biblical church unity is simply this:

Do Our Job -- Our Real Job.

If we would devote ourselves to this both as individual Christians and as congregations, we would have less to expend on bickering.²ⁿ Our differences would be less important to us than this important job to which we should have committed ourselves. We would serve the Lord united in biblical unity.

Conclusion 3: Three Final Thoughts We Ought to Consider

For first thought, there are always acts of service to the Lord that can be done. When some of these expire or are done, there are always new ones that need to be done. There are acts of kindness, deeds of doing the *Matthew 28:19-20* Great Commission³ⁿ to make disciples of Jesus Christ, deeds of supporting Christians facing opposition, and other categories of things to do. These are things needing done for the Lord, Whom we are to serve. With no regard of who is correct or how much 'learning' such people have, Scripture describes those whose focus is off "words" of Jesus Christ and "godly life" (NLT 1996) and onto "disputes" (NKJV) as "knowing nothing" (ASV) alongside "puffed up with conceit" (ESV) at 1 *Timothy 6:3-4*. However, there are churches that would refuse to join in service on these needs, and solely on principle of different congregational distinctives, even if no such distinctives need compromised. Rather than help in the work of the Lord or accept help in work for the Lord, they do nothing due to disagreed-upon congregational distinctives irrelevant to "a godly life." Such people should seriously ask themselves Who *or* WHAT their "first love" truly is.⁴ⁿ

Christians do not serve 'whats'; the Lord is Whom the Christian is to serve, and Christians are to be busy in the work of the Lord. Most of us have or have had jobs where we work with others under authority of someone else. Jobs involve tasks to be done. If a certain task required a group effort, and one or more persons refused to do the task with others because of a disagreement irrelevant to the task at hand, the task may not get done. Typically, the job authority would find this reason unacceptable if the job was not done. Christians have Someone to serve. God through Paul

¹ In the early 1800's, Evangelicals had not been divided by Bible skepticism, and focused effort on good works, benevolent action for peace and education.* After Bible skepticism, social action became associated with those who denied Scripture.* Bible believing Christians should not let Bible skeptics influence them so.

*R. Wentz, American Religious Traditions, page 361.

² The 1804 *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* expresses desire that "preachers and people" will "pray more and dispute less"*; I propose this adaptation: **It would be good if Christians would serve more and bicker less.**

*Quoted by Barton Stone in Thompson, Voices from Cane Ridge, page 82.

³ Proselytizing among followers of Jesus Christ is far easier than converting people unyielded to Him. It does NOT fit the Great Commission and is NOT a valid substitute.

Some seek Christians like unbelievers because those Christians do not agree 'enough' with them. One example is 'evangelizing' people to 'Christ and' some designation of their group, such as 'The Lord and His church.' To be a Christian, the **ONE** Person to be agreed with is Jesus Christ. Evangelism is to be about Jesus Christ and Him alone. Let no one presume for themselves the importance of Jesus Christ.

⁴ There should especially be grave questions about "first love" if someone is willing to commit worldly sins for congregational distinctives. Scripture NOWHERE authorizes any notion that actions that are sins in the world ever cease to be SIN -- including 'at church' or 'for the good of the church.' Therefore, it is important to remember 1) the New Testament-era church precept at 1 Corinthians 4:6 quoted in the footer, and 2) WHOM sin is an offense to. Because of these facts, it is fitting for anyone favorably predisposed to such conduct to wonder whether s/he serves a WHOM or a WHAT.

wrote to Christians "ye serve the Lord Christ" (ASV) at *Colossians* 3:24. May none of us cause a task in the Lord's work to be left undone for reasons irrelevant to the task and stated to be non-priorities.



For my second thought, I point out that many societies once friendly to Christianity are no longer so. Religious non-belief grew fastest of major religious systems in the 1900's.¹ In the United States, the Constitution's First Amendment intended to assure religious freedom gets aggressively abused to stifle religious expression of Christians, justify advocacy of views oppositional to Christianity in government-sponsored venues, and deny Christian organizations and people benefits afforded others. Ideologues want the public educated about religions of non-Christians, and an open exchange of ideas – so long as they are not biblical. Further, in the early 1900's, Bible-believing Christians were seen in the mainstream as decent people; a century later, the same are often portrayed as ignorant troublemaking scoundrels. This is just one such nation that has undergone changes.

Many societies seek premises to reject Christ's truths. Per *Matthew* 16:18 and *Acts* 2:47, there is only one church, and God adds all Christ's followers to it. When Christians exaggerate differences in assembly-time affairs so much as to claim separation, skeptics have attacked via 'With so many of you teaching different things, there is no reason to believe any of it.' Well-meaning people have been bewildered by this too,² and there is concern if Christ's prayer for oneness of the church has been met.³

Let us avoid misperceptions and confusion by emphasizing what is most important. *Hebrews* 10:16 shows that God pointed to Christians in *Jeremiah* 31:33 "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (NKJV) – He did this so thoroughly it gets overlooked. We generally agree on doctrines of Scripture about our conduct all week in regular life in/out of assembly, plus we all share the same adopted family and the same justification through Jesus Christ to serve the same Lord.

Many people who claim affiliation with the church think similarly to the skeptics; focusing on groups and matters of assembly time, they allege 'How could we all be Christians because we teach different things?' In doing so, they show the problem described 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).

Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."⁴ 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 a person is off-topic, s/he "is conceited and understands nothing." The doctrine we teach should be about *what Jesus Christ actually spoke*. Christ spoke mostly about godliness in overall living and about Himself, and none of us should be fixated on teaching things different from what He spoke or things alien to what He spoke.

Paul taught the same doctrines that Jesus Christ taught, per 1 *Corinthians* 4:17 when he mentioned "principles of behavior| in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV). Paul further described what he taught plus something he opposed at 1 *Timothy* 1:5b-6 "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).

Therefore, if anyone's teachings are focused on matters outside "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" and "a godly life," then this is negative in light of God's written Word. *Hebrews* 10:16 shows God pointed to Christians in *Jeremiah* 31:33 "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (NKJV) – He did this so thoroughly that many take it for granted. We all generally agree on the doctrines of Scripture about Who Christ is and how

¹ In McManners, *The Oxford History of Christianity*, page 649-50.

² J. H. Moore's contribution in *Brethren's Tracts and Pamphlets, The*, page *The Perfect Plan of Salvation* 25.

³ Charles Draper's contribution in Cabal, *Apologetics Study Bible*, page 1709.

⁴ in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1257.

people should conduct themselves in overall life at all times in and out of assembly. Those are the doctrines that Jesus Christ's preaching was about. If our congregations would all focus on these things, we would all be teaching the same thing.¹ⁿ A big reason why many people claiming church affiliation assert we teach different things is this: their focus is on their groups, group affairs, and preaching themselves – those people are off-focus from what Scripture says to focus on.

Whose church is it? Christ's church exists to promote His teachings. It does not exist to promote our teachings – even on how to serve Him. People who insist the church adopt their teachings hijack His church. Whatever we wish taught, we must accept that the Lord's church is His – not ours.

Hebrews 10:16 shows that God pointed to Christians in Jeremiah 31:33 "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (NKJV) – He did this so thoroughly we overlook it. We all generally agree on the doctrines of Scripture about how Christians should behave throughout regular life in/out of assembly, plus we all share the same adopted family and same justification through Jesus Christ to serve the same Lord. Our congregation distinctions are far less important than He is. We have much more in common than different; what and *WHOM* we have in common are more important than our differences. Let us show the world clearly that our common *CHRIST* we serve is foremost for us – John 13:35 + 17:20-1.²ⁿ Those doctrines prevalent most of the week are common to all of us, and are the Lord Jesus Christ's highest concern per Matthew 25:31-46.

Let us take the example of children. Their wisdom on church congregations would spare expenditures of 'church mergers' and 'ecumenical agreements.' To children in general, churches of Christians are simply churches of Christians, but just different items of the same thing. To most children, the similarities are most noticed. It should be regretted that many adult Christians overlook these. Lest one scorns this, behold a teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Word of God. At Matthew 18:1-4, reminiscent of modern squabbles over 'best' congregational distinctives, the disciples of Jesus Christ were squabbling over a matter of greatness; the response of the *LORD*:

THE CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 25:31-46

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

HIGHLIGHTS OF MATTHEW 25:31-46

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..."

"Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord,..."

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me..."

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels..."

"Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord,..."

"Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life" (ASV emphases mine).

"Jesus called a little child to him. He stood the child before the followers. Then he said, 'I tell you the truth. You must change and become like little children. If you don't do this, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'" (ICB).

¹ 'I am sure the Lord would want us to teach this' is a common opinion within factious behavior. Mortals do not determine what is important before the Lord. Scripture tells us what the Lord deems important to teach and all we need to know about it.

² John 13:35 and 17:20-1 record Jesus Christ saying:

"By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (NBV) ;

"for they who will believe [on] Me through their message, so that they may all be one, as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me" (NBV | ASV | NBV) .

Unkind bickering related to disagreeing groups among professed followers of Christ works against these purposes. First, those involved do not cooperate with Him to be an evidence that He sought for Who He is. Second, those who are happily, eagerly, and zealously involved in such do not reflect following Him; certainly they do not show that they value serving Him above their own factious concerns.

To most children, a church of Christians is just that. Most children get the *Hebrews 10:24-5* purpose for church congregations when they hear the likes of 'go out and obey God and follow Jesus Christ and do what is good and be nice' at church congregations of every type. It is "grown-ups" who dis-educate children against seeing how similar churches of Christians really are. Matthew 18:1-4 tells us to be childlike; oh that more of us would recover the wisdom of children in this regard.

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



For my third and final thought, contrary to what some people think, Scripture is not always clear; Scripture itself states it has "things hard to understand" (NASB) at 2 Peter 3:16.¹ Too many people accuse Christians of sin-seeking motives for disliked precepts – wrongly.

An example is Perseverance of the Saints/Eternal Security = "Once Saved Always Saved." Its opponents often allege that the holders do so to sin in comfort – but holders rarely live in wanton sin, so the impugned motive is false. The belief is based partly on 1 John 2:19, the only Scripture case of departure from the Christian community: "they were not of us" plus comment "if they had been of us, they would have continued with us" (ASV). At John 8:31b Jesus says "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (NASB). Perhaps a fruit of biblical faith is that it lasts, and maybe regeneration is so thorough and powerful that each Christian is entirely a 2 Corinthians 5:17 "new creation" so much that "The old is gone; lo, the new has come" (NBV) and is permanent.

It is unwise to judge other Christians as some judge believers in Perseverance, because one may unwittingly indict oneself. By saying 'They only say they cannot lose their salvation so they can sin without fear,' the accuser says 'If I was not worried about Hell, I would like to sin more.' It should not take fear-based compulsion to get one to serve Christ. Per Titus 2:14, after salvation we should be "zealous of good works" (ASV), and Romans 12:1-2 gives the motive of gratitude: "in view of God's mercies" (TNIV). Whether or not one can ever lose salvation is irrelevant to the devoted follower of Jesus Christ because s/he never intends to stop serving the Lord.²ⁿ

Regarding these false accusations, 1 Timothy 6:3-4 warns us about one potential cause:

"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 and argument over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, |evil surmisings|" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV|ASV).

People who focus on things outside the two approved topics are prone to "evil surmisings" – including attempts to imitate supernatural divinely-enabled mind-reading in Scripture. Many who would refuse first-hand sources of other groups' views are eager to accuse anyway. Proverbs 18:13 says "He that giveth |sentence in a matter| before he heareth, It is folly and shame unto him" (ASV|BishB|ASV). Whether or not we are open to agreeing, we should try to learn the REAL reasons others disagree with us if we wish to address disputes, and stay focused on 1 Timothy 6:3's topics.

God did not give us Scripture to fight over. Until the 1500's, God allowed private copies of any part of Scripture readable by the owner to remain a rare commodity³ⁿ; only in the 1500's did this begin to change anywhere.⁴ⁿ What is the purpose of Scripture? 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says

¹ Pointed out in Stanley, *Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible*, page 1478.

² The flip side of this debate: those who attack Perseverance are concerned that it would lead to people not serving the Lord. While misguided about proper motivation for serving Him, it is a noble concern. Charitableness should be directed both ways.

³ Often pointed out by Orthodox and Catholic apologists, but for a different reason.

⁴ Note: God could very easily reinstate similar conditions if He ever sees fit to do 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."¹

Contrary to 2 Timothy 3:16-7, too many people take Scripture, given to promote good deeds, and instead use it to attack and fight against others who are servants of Jesus Christ, shun/protest people whom He has accepted, and/or make it a reason to refuse to join others in good works of service to the Lord. Scripture was given by God without inaccuracy and is useful for teaching about *any* matter it addresses, and for addressing what is incorrect and wrong – *but it was not given for those purposes*; Scripture was given to promote good deeds in service to the Lord.²ⁿ Any use of Scripture should be subject to that purpose of Scripture. Let us stop misusing Scripture for purposes directly opposed to what God gave it to us for; let us submit to God on His primary purpose for Scripture.

2 Timothy 2:24a says "And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all" (ASV). The second attribute of the Lord's servant is also translated "must be kind to everyone" (ICB). People who serve the Lord are to be "kind to everyone" – not just to those in agreement or potentially so. To always do so is challenging; it is a high calling.

If any would presume perfect obedience to the Lord at any time of the week, 1 John 1:10 warns "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar" (ESV|NBV). In as much as any does the former, s/he does the latter. Scripture approves the practice of "esteemeth every day alike" (ASV) at Romans 14:5, so ultimately, no day is distinct, so presuming to claim perfect obedience for any time is against 1 John 1:10. 1 Peter 5:5b warns that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (ESV).

Scripture itself says it has "things hard to understand" (NASB) at 2 Peter 3:16.³ Due to centuries of church drifts from Scripture and loss of certainty over the precise New Testament-era church's tenets and common practice, how best to

A Possible Reason Why God Values

Good Deeds above Worship-Specific Activity

The Lord is not like the gods of many other religions. He is not most concerned about ritualistic worship of Him.

At Matthew 9:13 and Matthew 12:7, Jesus quoted Old Testament Scripture Hosea 6:6 when He taught "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (ASV). This was a statement of priorities, and numerous passages teach the same theme.

When God created the universe, His aim was that it be "very good" (JPS 1985) per Genesis 1:31. Humanity's sin ruined it at Genesis 3 and per Romans 5:12, 8:19-23. It is logical that God would want His servants to work for His original aim in His creation by doing good deeds.

'We Need Revival'

The author of this study has beheld calls among multiple denominations for revival. "Revival" means 'get more on fire' for the Lord, usually amidst consecutive days of preaching. Problem: many of the people urging "revival" behind pulpits stand behind the same pulpits insisting that everyone adopt distinctly-religious group tenets not agreed on by all Christians.

Revival will not likely result when preaching sin. 1 Timothy 6:3-4 opposes departing from "sound words" of Jesus and from "doctrine conforming to a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Titus 3:8b-9a says that Christians ought to "devote themselves to good [deeds]. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" (ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV). About disputes irrelevant to "good deeds," Titus 3:11 calls people "factious" over such disputes as so: "perverted" (ASV).

Urging sin behind pulpits works against revival. 2 Timothy 2:15 urges "handling aright the word of truth" (ASV), and 3:16-7 says Scripture "is breathed out by God" (ESV) to make His servants "entirely instructed | unto all good works."^{*} Use of Scripture at odds with its purpose is mishandling it. As long as people do not follow Scripture regarding opinions on matters off-topic to its purpose, and act contrary to it in this regard, a major need for revival will be REAL forsaking of these sins.

*RVR 1909 "entieramente instruído" translated | KJV.

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

² In disputes over matters irrelevant to Scripture's purpose, many people seek the 'low road' against those they disagree with. Scripture has teachings on how to act. These people imagine that Scripture is 'not that simple' and 'not to be taken at face value' in actions regarding those they disagree with. However, **Scripture is given for the very purpose of promoting good deeds, so of all subjects that it addresses, it will be clearest on that.**

³ Pointed out in Stanley, Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible, page 1478.

understand and follow Scripture will always be an open question. There have been centuries of people making lifelong efforts for answers to this question, and often with great peril to the studiers' lives, loved ones, health, liberty, and/or property, and with great sacrifice when it would have been most convenient to just conform. After this, if any person would boast that s/he or an affiliated group has been able to set aside all human frailties, and has found the perfect way in every way to interpret/infer from and follow Scripture -- and claim that anyone disagreeing is by absolute necessity wrong and/or ill-motived¹ⁿ -- then s/he needs to study and/or review Scripture on humility or on both charitableness and humility.

Further, Scripture is from God Himself, and Scripture teaches and does not teach whatever Scripture teaches and does not teach regardless of who points out what and why. *Philippians 3:13* principles "forgetting what is behind" (NBV), so in studies to follow Scripture well, we should involve even Christians of groups which caused past uncertainty. Christian students of Scripture in all the denominations, 'fellowships,' 'brotherhoods,' and real non-denominational congregations can and should engage in and share a joint effort²ⁿ toward progressively better answers on how to best

A Side Note on Scripture Priorities

1 Corinthians gives a glimpse into Paul's priorities for the wayward Corinthian congregation. Paul started by "pointing them toward distinctly Christian behavior."** Although verification of Scripture was not done until the 1500's, for expediency we will use data based on the 413 verse divisions.

- ★ The first 154 verses addressed matters relating to carnal desire and regular life, such as divisiveness brought to assembly and fornication. This is chapters 1-8, about 37.3%.
- ★ After this, Paul spends 27 verses, which are chapter 9, defending his merits as an apostle. This is about 6.5%.
- ★ Then, Paul returns to the topic prior, again discussing a matter relevant to life away from church assembly, and remains there for 32 verses. This is chapter 10, about 7.7%.
- ★ Only now, at chapter 11, does Paul begin to discuss matters related to worship in assembly. Chapters 11-14 discuss these matters. This is 118 verses, which make approximately 28.6%.
- ★ After this, he discusses an important matter of Christian theology about Christ and His work in chapter 15. This is 58 verses, which is approximately 14%.
- ★ To close, Paul adds a personal note. This is 24 verses, which is approximately 5.8%.

This data is very telling; leaving out personal topics, between

1. discussions about daily Christian living and avoiding carnal nonreligious-type sin, versus
 2. Christian worship-specific matters and theology,
- there are 362 verses. The first 186 verses ≈ 51.4% are spent on the former. Afterward, 176 verses ≈ 48.6% are spent on the latter.

This refutes 'Proper religious belief is the source and guarantee of good Christian living.' The meaning of the phrases "first things first" and "first order of business" is familiar: matters of highest importance are addressed first. God through Paul not only addressed daily Christian living and avoiding carnal nonreligious-type sins first, He also addressed them most.

*Disciples Study Bible, page 1445.

Exodus 20:17 "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"* -- or the Lord's:

Ephesians 5:31-32 closes a discourse using an illustration of the church as the bride of Christ. At Matthew 16:18 Christ said "I will build my church" (ASV). The church was established to follow Christ's teachings. Too many people insist that the whole church should follow their teachings about 'how to serve Him.' They effectively try to make the Lord's church into their church -- in likeness to coveting the Lord's wife.

Christ wants that His church "may all be one" (ASV) per John 17:20-1. Beware of violating Christ's will for His church because of opinions in subjects Christ is not documented saying one thing about. Beware of acting against Christ's will due to the likes of coveting the Lord's wife.

*JPS 1917.

¹ People who accuse carelessly -- especially towards Christians -- should note Revelation 12:9-10. It calls Satan "accuser" -- specifically "accuser of our brethren" (ASV) meaning "accuser" of Christians. People who behave in such ways should wonder whose will and ways their deeds *really* accord with.

When such accusations are done despite known inaccuracy, they are lies. Jesus said of Satan "he is a liar and the father of lies" (NASB, ESV) at John 8:44.

These passages should warn people who are flippant in accusations against Christians when promoting/debating their religious tenets. Such people need to consider whose will and ways their deeds *really* accord with.

² Amos 3:3 says rhetorically "Will two walk together, except they have agreed" (JPS 1917). All Christians agree that we should serve Christ. If Christians would put the **agreed-upon duty** of **serving Christ** first, this would be **well-sufficient agreement**.

understand and follow Scripture. As Christians, we should deem this worthy of uncompromisingly holding ourselves to demeanor and conduct which show quality faith and which honor the standards our Lord Jesus Christ called us to.

We can do more than study Scripture - we can also act on it. Talk does nothing - we need to DO. Let us stop chattering 'We're all Christians' while in reality requiring whole-hearted belief of cherished distinctive precepts before biblical unity is not resisted. Let us all remember WHOSE church the Lord's church is. Let us not marginalize or shun any whom the Lord Jesus Christ has accepted. Let us accept when doings of disagreed-with fellow servants have no real effect on how we serve, not presume to unneeded deeds neither edifying nor authorized, and humbly shy away from areas that are solely God's jurisdiction. We have studied how "doctrine" in Scripture is beyond events of church assembly; it is about proper esteem of Jesus Christ and good deeds in godly lifestyles. It is doubtful that anything less would have been deemed "doctrine" in Scripture.

As the 21st century opens, what is deemed "doctrine" in Scripture is increasingly needed in our world that becoming more as 2 Timothy 3:1-5 describes. Let us start: "grievous times shall come" (ASV). 3:2 says "people |will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, |disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy" (NCV|NASB|ABUV). We have more and more people who think only of their own interests. More and more people will do any wrongful scheme they can pull off for ever the more money regardless of need for it. More and more people boast of themselves even for things that should shame them. More and more people are eager to 'smear' whomever they target even with no provocation. More and more young people delight in defying their parents. More and more people feel not the slightest gratitude for anything done for them. More and more people enjoy irreverence. 3:3 has "unloving, |implacable|, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good" (NASB|ABUV, ASV|NASB) and 3:4 reports they "will turn against their friends, and will do foolish things without thinking. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God" (NCV). There are more and more people who have little to no selfless care for others, and normally give no thought to others at all. More and more people resolve to have vendettas and cannot be placated. More and more people enjoy 'getting and passing the dirt' on whomever they can. More and more people glory in ruthlessness and will even turn on people friendly to them. More and more people prefer not to do what is good because it is 'no fun,' dislike seeing what is good, and disdain people who do what is good. Many do whatever they want without any thought of what is responsible or sensible, and seek foremost their own pleasure. 3:5a has "holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof" (ASV). More and more people are 'spiritual seekers' open to an 'as much as I like it' assent of most religious systems - but for Jesus Christ, only excuses to reject Him.

Unbelievers have never rightly valued Jesus Christ, but it is getting worse as the 21st century opens. Unbelievers who claim church affiliation depreciate Jesus Christ in media materials targeted even at Christian audiences. Among unbelievers overall, it is becoming fashionable to treat Jesus with less respect and courtesy than founders of other world religions or even other great moral teachers.

Modern predominance of moral religions plus respect for them have influenced society, and caused the church to miss priorities of doctrine. In ancient times, many religions were permissive of carnalities. As of c. 2000, a rise in disdain of meaningful moral religion plus a rise of moral relativism threaten to bring this permissiveness back. There is rising acrimony for people who 'dare' say only what is right is right. More and more people have more disdain for so-called 'judgmental/uncaring' stands against wrongdoing than for doing or promoting what is wicked. More and more people give greater favor and sympathy to perpetrators than to victims. More and more people advocate for those who would or did do wrong to people. More and more people defy right and wrong for the principle of it, and/or to upset people. More and more people do evil things and 'why' is inexplicable. More and more people feel largely entitled to do as they wish regardless of how it affects others, and act on that sentiment at will. More and more people insist that right versus wrong is mainly a matter of personal opinion and preference, and there is growing ruthlessness for that insistence.

Many in the church indulge in fights that should not be fought, and give less heed to advances by real enemies. The Lord had and has far higher concerns for "doctrine" than modern congregation distinctives irrelevant to proper esteem of Jesus Christ or godly lifestyles.¹ⁿ In this fallen world, what is needed is for Jesus Christ's teachings to be followed and promoted.²ⁿ

Per Acts 11:26, "Christians" is synonymous with "disciples" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."³ Christ ordained a community of such followers at Matthew 16:18 "I will build My church" (NBV); "church" translates εκκλησιαν a form of εκκλησια. We have studied how εκκλησια in this context meant the community of Jesus Christ's followers.⁴ⁿ Jesus Christ 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). As His church, we should be following and promoting His teachings.

To serve the Lord, we need to simply do as Jesus Christ taught us and avoid doing what the written Word of God tells us not to do. Romans 16:17 has "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); "divisions" translates διχοστασια "standing apart,"⁵ meaning acts of dissociation. Scripture gives no 'rightness exemption.' Rather, let us do as the written Word of God tells us: Romans 15:5-7 says to have "harmony with one another" (NASB) and to "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (NASB). At John 17:20-1a Jesus Christ 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). Why? Finishing John 17:21, we see Him say "that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (ASV). It is easy for people who agree on a plethora of details to act as one; it is a more significant event when people who think different still act as one. Jesus Christ wanted the latter to be a testimony of Him to the world: He wanted us to act as one in enacting His teachings. Romans 12:1 has "I beg you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable | worship" (NBV | ESV). Out of gratitude, let us do as Jesus Christ wants.

¹ The unbelieving world overall is not as stupid as many in the church portray them. Unbelievers can read the four New Testament gospels and get a good idea of what Jesus is like and what His priorities are. They notice if there is disparity between this versus attitudes, activities, and priorities of a church congregation, organization, or distinguished individual. Unbelievers get bad impressions when the church leaves Jesus' **REAL** ways, values, and priorities; convoluted rationalizations do not help. Such unbelievers naturally become less open to heeding the church about any matter.

There are reasons why unbelievers dislike the church. One reason is as Scripture teaches: John 15:18-9 reports Jesus Christ saying "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you" and "therefore the world hateth you" (ASV). The church cannot accommodate this reason. A second reason: how many outspoken church leaderships, organizations, and approved people go far far away from the Jesus Whom unbelievers read about in the New Testament gospels in terms of attitude, priorities, normal conduct and/or demeanor. This should be fixed.

² In opposing the false doctrines of the world which deny that Jesus Christ is Who He is and/or which favor vice, we must do so consistent with the ways that Jesus Christ prescribed. Jesus Christ said at Matthew 22:39 "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (ASV), and He said at Luke 6:31 "Treat others exactly as you would have them treat you" (NBV). Ephesians 4:31 tells us to "put away" "all malice" (ASV). Ephesians 4:15 tells us to be "speaking the truth in love" (ASV). **It is not enough to be right**; opposing what is false and wicked must be done with right attitudes in right ways, or we sin.

Unlike unbelievers, Christians should know sin is sin and to act accordingly.

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

⁴ For details, please see Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church".

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

Let us remember what Jesus Christ did for us: He left Heaven; lived in this sin-infested world; devoted Himself to teaching us how to get to Heaven and how to live right, even while evil men opposed Him with fanatical hatred; fought temptation with such exertion that He lived sinless; despite total and perfect innocence, bore the defilement of countless people's sins and died horribly on our behalf. Jesus Christ said at *Matthew 16:18* "I will build My church" (NBV); "church" translates *ἐκκλησίαν* a form of *ἐκκλησία*. We have studied how *ἐκκλησία* in this context meant the community of Jesus Christ's followers.¹ⁿ At *John 17:20-1a* Jesus Christ prayed 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). He wants His community of followers united in following His teachings. Why? Finishing *John 17:21*, we see Him say "that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (ASV). He wanted a church united in enacting His teachings to be evidence that God sent Him. His church should therefore be united in enacting His teachings both as individuals and as congregations. In gratitude to the Savior Jesus Christ, let us testify about Him to the world in the ways that He wants, and let us be united harmoniously in practicing and promoting what we know are His teachings.

The Bible does not tell us to agree over a bunch of religious or institutional details; it tells us to be united. *2 Corinthians 11:3* refers to "the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (ASV). The means by which the church is to be united to serve our Master Jesus Christ is to befit "simplicity." *2 Timothy 3:16-7* says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV) and explains that this is so Christians can be "complete" (ASV) meaning "instruído = instructed | completely unto every good work" (RVR 1909 and translated|ASV). Scripture can make us "instructed completely" about what to DO to maintain unity. If we would follow in "simplicity" Scripture's teachings on what to DO to maintain unity, we would enact the unity Jesus Christ called for. No debating, dialoguing, or negotiating over matters of technical academic religion or over administrative matters should be needed. Frankly, the will of the Lord Jesus Christ for unity in His church should be considered non-negotiable and not subject to any other 'talks' among mortals. Our attitude should be 'It is the will of the Lord; we ought to be *acting now*.' Talk is too often used as a cover-up for a willful lack of meaningful action, and talk is too often used as a substitute for meaningful action. Talk has its use in communication amidst meaningful action. As a church, we need to follow in "simplicity" Scripture's instructions about what to DO to enact Jesus Christ's will of unity in His church, and thereby be united harmoniously in practicing and promoting what we know are His teachings.

Zephaniah 3:9 shows how the Lord wants people to serve Him: that they "serve Him with one |back" which refers to labor.² He wants us united in laboring for Him as if one back. *Ecclesiastes 4:9* has "Two are better off than one" and *4:12* has "a three-fold cord is not easily broken" (JPS 1985).

Let us close with this final admonition. *2 Timothy 3:16-7* says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV) and explains that this is so Christians can be "complete" (ASV) meaning "instruído = instructed | completely unto every good work" (RVR 1909 and translated|ASV). Scripture does not tell us what to think in order to facilitate unity; Scripture tells us what to DO to maintain unity. The written Word of God also tells us to "be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (ASV) at *James 1:22*. All of us Christians agree on our obligation to serve the Lord Jesus Christ; we would not be Christians otherwise, and that is the essence of our faith.³ⁿ That agreed-on and true obligation should take priority over whatever differences we have. Let us Christians more proactively start living like we know that we all share one faith to serve one Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians can all cooperate in making the best joint effort to do the best overall service for our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ that we can, and we owe it to Him. ■

¹ For details, please see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

² JPS 1985|margin.

³ For details, see *Part 4/The Basics of Salvation* and *Part 4/What All This Means*.