

## *Church Unity with Bible Authority*

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### Abstract

This addresses issues that have hindered Christian unity, addresses divisiveness, teaches biblical Christian unity of purpose, and suggests applications. All is done holding to full accuracy and authority of Scripture. Generally, the study can be read skipping around among essays. Parts 2-7 are main component.

### Getting Started, Outlined, and Oriented

People argue about the Bible. This is as old as the Bible itself. In around 30 C.E.,<sup>1n</sup> the Lord Jesus Christ died and was resurrected, and He started the church of His followers inaugurated by His apostles. The New Testament is our record from the New Testament-era church, and its contents were considered binding. It was written in Greek without book titles and without divisions into chapters or verses; titles came later, chapter divisions came later yet, and verse divisions came in the 1500's. The church has always had problems, and after all the apostles died, harmful changes accelerated. By the 1500's, the two largest portions of the church were so far off their biblical basis that large-scale calls to return to Scripture could no longer be suppressed. In tacit admission of this disparity, church authorities initially opposed mass printing of the Scriptures for the common people, and/or their translation into languages understandable by the common people.<sup>2n</sup>

These were violent times. In 1408, when England was Catholic, the Oxford Council forbade Scripture editions in common language<sup>3</sup> after the 1300's John Wycliffe-John Purvey Bible in Middle English. Catholic authorities in Belgium captured English translator William Tyndale to have him martyred, which happened in 1536.<sup>4</sup> Francisco de Enzinas, despite effort to avoid offending anyone with his 1543 Spanish New Testament translation, escaped prison as his translation was suppressed.<sup>5</sup> The first full Bible Spanish translation from original languages was done by Cassiodoro/Casiodoro de Reyna/Reina in 1569 who was a refugee from the Spanish Inquisition,<sup>6</sup> and a revision was finished in 1602 by Cypriano/Cipriano de Valera, another refugee from the Inquisition.<sup>7</sup> In Orthodox territory, a 1600's Bible translation into modern Greek was done by Archimandrite Maximos Kallipolites; sponsor Kyrillos Loukaris wrote a preface that reports opponents who wanted to keep people from knowing the Scriptures.<sup>8</sup> Opposition to Scripture being effectively accessible to the masses was common because many church authorities feared the masses would see the mismatch between their policies and Scripture. Most of the church was over 1000 years off biblical course, and uncertainty over how best to go back to Scripture caused disagreement among those trying to do so. The church remained impeded from unity by a non-Scripture assumption that `unity depends on agreement.'

<sup>1</sup> I use C.E./B.C.E. instead of A.D./B.C. *SOLELY* because some people find the latter disenfranchising. Scripture never commands it, so I opt to avoid unnecessary offense.

**Notes with "n" are annotations; notes without are bibliographic. Bolds in Bible quotes are mine; otherwise, all quoted emphases are original unless noted otherwise. I often change Bible translations mid-quote; I use " | " for such places.**

<sup>2</sup> This was not a universal practice in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic groups. Catholic authorities in Italy and France permitted translation of Scripture into common languages there.\* Orthodox bishop Kyrillos Loukaris in the 1600's supported a Protestant proposal to translate the Bible into modern Greek.<sup>†</sup>

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

<sup>†</sup> Vapouris, *Translating the Scriptures into Modern Greek*, page 5.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV To NIV*, page 20.

<sup>4</sup> John K. Hutcheson in J. Williams, Shaylor, *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*, page 114.

<sup>5</sup> E. North, *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, page 304.

<sup>6</sup> González, *La Era de los Reformadores*, page 211.

<sup>7</sup> E. North, *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, page 307.

<sup>8</sup> Vapouris, *Translating the Bible into Modern Greek*, pages 7-8.

<sup>x</sup> This study in its current draft can be downloaded and printed for free at < <http://dstele1976.tripod.com/unity2.html> >.

A non-Scripture assumption 'unity depends on agreement' had been common in the church since nearly its beginning. It caused the church in Europe to be largely divided from the church in Asia and Africa in the 400's. That non-Scripture assumption remained common during the 1500's Reformation in Europe and its aftermath. Because of that non-Scripture assumption, church groups that disagree have often continued to resist unity even through the 1900's and after.

As time passes, ever the more Christians have suspected that factional antagonism and aloofness are not right. In our effort to follow Scripture ever the better, let us revisit old assumptions on church unity, and study how church unity in Scripture is *unity of purpose*.

Biblical church unity is NOT uniform thought and NOT uniform congregation practice. Biblical church unity is NOT organizational union. Biblical church unity IS *unity of purpose*.

The purpose of this study was to put in written form an organized, systematic, and detailed presentation of Scripture's teachings about unity of Christians in the church. There is no intent for a thorough or persuasive treatise on any subject unrelated to unity of Christians in the church. The goal of this document was to study Scripture's teachings about this, examine the history of the church, and put these together to call for actions needed to grow an improved unity of Christians in the church.

The document outline is on the next page. The main component of this document is *Part 2* to *Part 7*. If readers choose to limit their reading to that area, they will see the core of this study.

I designed this document in hopes that a reader will normally be able to read this document piecemeal. This means that if all went according to plan, you can read one essay, then skip to another essay in the study, and not be lost. This leads to repetition of important material, but in educational practice, repetition of important material tends to reinforce it. I hope the effort to keep this document readable in piecemeal explains some of the unusual traits of this document.

*Part 1* can be skipped by many Christians and is more technical than the rest of this document. It shows that the Scriptures in their original languages in their original texts are the ultimate authority for divine truths. If the reader knows this, s/he can skip *Part 1*.

In *Part 2*, we discuss major causes of why the church became divided, and then start toward solutions. In *Part 3*, we see how the church needed all geographic regions of the church to get the Scriptures assembled together to have God's written Word. In *Part 4*, we clarify who is a Christian, so that we know who is included when we discuss biblical church unity. In *Part 5*, we discuss the Bible's teachings relevant to Christian non-divisiveness and unity. In *Part 6*, we discuss how those Bible teachings are connected to real church situations. In *Part 7*, we focus on action.

After this are two afterthoughts. The *Epilogue* discusses what the church could be like if biblical unity was enacted. The *Urging to Action* calls individual Christians to make their own efforts.

The *Personal Statement* shares some of my own personal experiences enlightening this study. The *Bibliography and More* includes printed volumes, Bible translations, and acknowledgements of other helpful resources. The *Permission to Circulate* explains freedoms to do so. The *Scripture Index of New Testament Books* lists pages where New Testament books or passages in them are discussed.

The main theses of this document are as follows. The church of Jesus Christ's followers was established to enact His teachings. Unfortunately, there are some carnal tendencies that entice all people to sin; those include desires toward prideful self-exaltation, toward strife, and toward factiousness. Church-affiliated persons' indulgences in these lusts have combined to cause divisions in the church. Furthermore, to disagree and divide are two different actions; this is a distinction many do not know to make, and this is a distinction that many refuse to make. The Bible teaches a distinction. Many people have viewed 'unity' as synonymous with 'agreement over religious details,' and/or with mergers of church groups. Again, Scripture teaches neither such thing. Scripture teaches something entirely different about church unity.

The Bible teaches that church unity is simply to be unity of purpose – to enact Jesus Christ's teachings. Christians need to learn these truths of Scripture, resist their own carnal divisive urges, and strive to stay rallied together around serving Jesus Christ by enacting His teachings.

Document Outline \* = essays of greater significance to this study's theses.

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Scripture Index

Let us now proceed with the study. Then, let us apply the Bible's teachings on this subject. ■

### *Part 1: Identifying the Authority*

**Note:** If you already recognize that the correct final authority of Christians is the New Testament-era church's Scriptures, in the texts and languages as originally given by God, then *Part 1* is unnecessary to you.

#### The Ancient Texts – Passages on Their Significance

2 Timothy 3:16-7a was written in the first century C.E., in Greek. The Greek words written at that time can be translated

- ◆ “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete” (ESV | KJV, NKJV | ASV).

The Greek word translated “complete” is ἀρτιος and means “perfectly fit”<sup>1</sup> “entirely suited; complete”<sup>2</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show regarding Scripture “It is God’s way of preparing us in every way” (NLT 1996). This means that the Old Testament and the Greek New Testament Scriptures of the New Testament-era church were those Scriptures which were entirely sufficient to build proper doctrine on; they prepare “in every way” including to build proper doctrine. This means that the New Testament churches’ Old Testament and Greek New Testament are by themselves a proper foundation and standard for all things doctrinal.

What does the word “Scripture” mean? The Greek word translated “Scriptures” is γραφή,<sup>3</sup> means “what has been written,”<sup>4</sup> and refers to the text of written documents.<sup>5</sup> The text on manuscripts and copies of Scripture, and not the manuscripts and copies themselves, is Scripture.

We know from the context of the passage that God meant the Old Testament, but we know He also meant the New Testament from another passage. The New Testament church held New Testament books as Scripture. At what is now 1 Timothy 5:18 God through Paul wrote “the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire” (ASV); the first quote of “the scripture” here is from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the second is from Luke 10:7.<sup>6</sup> Compare the Greek:

Luke 10:7 end

ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ

1 Timothy 5:18 second quote<sup>7n</sup>

Ἀξιός ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ<sup>8</sup>

an exact match minus γάρ = “for.”<sup>9</sup> In Luke 10:7, the clause was linked by “for” to a prior statement of Jesus, but in 1 Timothy 5:18 the clause was meant to be independent, so this would be a fitting grammatical adjustment. Rules for quotation were not as strict in the ancient world as they are in American society.

It is important to note that “Scripture” refers to something written, so we see that what 1 Timothy 5:18 quoted as “the scripture” was written. That written text is in our New Testament at what is now Luke 10:7. Therefore, both the Old Testament of the New Testament church and the New Testament itself were understood as Scripture by the New Testament church and by God.

2 Timothy 3:15, immediately before the previous passage, stated that the Scriptures are

- ◆ “the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (ASV).

Hence, the Scriptures are directly related to salvation; the Scriptures can empower us with the knowledge of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>3</sup> Strong, The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, pages *Concordance* 1176, *Greek Dictionary* 20; Young, Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible, page *Analytical* 844

<sup>4</sup> Richards, New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words, page 544.

<sup>5</sup> Strong, The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, page *Greek Dictionary* 20; Vine et al, Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary, page 552 NT.

<sup>6</sup> Noted in Paige Patterson’s article in Criswell, Believer’s Study Bible, page 1843.

<sup>7</sup> These will be quoted with the extra marks, but typically other Greek will not.

<sup>8</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, pages 246, 733.

<sup>9</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 246.

Scripture is the written Word of God. The Palestinian Jews' Old Testament was among those Scriptures described at 2 Timothy 3:15-7. At Psalm 138:2b God wrote to Himself some Hebrew that can be translated

- ◆ "You have exalted Your name, Your word, above all" (JPS 1985).

This passage shows that God's Word stands with God's name as the highest authority.

Related to the doctrine of God giving us the Scriptures is God's promise to preserve them in such passages as in Psalm 12, where Christian verses 6-7 and Jewish verses 7-8 are translated

- ◆ "The words of the LORD are pure words, As silver tried in a crucible on the earth, refined seven times. Thou wilt keep them O LORD; thou wilt preserve each from this age evermore" (JPS 1917 | JPS 1985).

This passage teaches that the Word of God will always exist in some form.<sup>1n</sup> This means that the text that He provided will always exist in some form. No passage specifies how God sees to this.

At Psalm 119:152, God informs us that His Word, the collection of His written testimonies, was forever established when given, and Psalm 89:34/35 shows God will not change His Word:

- ◆ "Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever" (NKJV).
- ◆ "no olvidaré mi pacto ni | cambiaré | mi palabra" (RVR 1995 | LBLA | VP)<sup>2n</sup> = "not will-I-forget my pact neither will-I-change my word."

In all aspects, including the process of preserving His Word, God will not change Scripture. Note that He refers to His Word in the singular; there is only one Word of God. When each book of the Old Testament was written, it was written in one of the Semitic languages Hebrew and Aramaic. Hence, when those books were written the first time, as in God giving out each text, it was in those languages. The New Testament was written in Greek. Hence, as the Word of God is unchanging, in the strictest sense those original texts are the written Word of God because they were given by Him and the Word of God does not change.

The books of Scripture were delivered individually -- not all at once. Most books of both Testaments were not titled as now. Further, no divisions were provided; division into chapters was added first, and then later those chapters were divided into verses. The 1539 Great Bible, which was an English translation before the King James Version, used chapters and lettered sections, and section breaks did not always coincide with our present verses; the break after Revelation 13 B starts 13 C in what is now verse 13:7 "And power was given hym..." -- the middle of the present verse. Book titles as a whole, chapter divisions/numberings, and verse divisions/numberings are later additions by humans to make using Scripture easier; they cannot be considered given by God and are not Scripture in the strictest sense.

<sup>1</sup> No part of Scripture has ever ceased to exist. God has preserved His Word perfectly.

<sup>2</sup> We will be consulting foreign language translations. **Prejudices that foreign language Bible translations are 'less the Bible' than English translations will NOT be entertained here.** Just as our translations are direct from texts in Greek and Hebrew, so also are foreign language translations. In the exact way that most of us who read English read our King James Version editions, our New American Standard Bible editions, and editions of other English translations, and think 'The Bible says,' most Spanish-reading people read their editions of the Reina-Valera Revisión of 1909 or 1960, or other Revisiónes or other Spanish translations, and think 'La biblia dice' = 'The Bible says.' We will consider reading foreign translations and English translations to be reading the Bible in the same sense.

Foreign languages have different word-meaning match-up combinations and different grammatical constructions than English has. Many times, these aspects make something clear that would normally be missed in English. Hence, that is why I will often draw attention to these foreign translations. Also, foreign translations have an independence from our Bible translation traditions. English translators tend to be influenced by older English translations. Foreign translators are influenced not by these but by older translations into their languages. Foreign language translation independence can sometimes shed light on passages.

Interestingly, the 1611 KJV long preface *The Translators to the Reader* mentioned consulting "the Spanish" (10th page), likely the 1602 Valera Bible revision of the 1569 Reyna/Reina Bible. They too used foreign language translations.

### What Books Compose Scripture?

There is some discussion as to what collection of books makes up our Bible. Between Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism and related churches there is only one New Testament list of books. However, there are differences in Old Testament lists, and it is disputed which books we should recognize for the Old Testament. We should wonder what Old Testament Jesus and His apostles might have used. We have the information to recognize this: first century historian Josephus was a Palestinian Jew just like Jesus and the apostles. In *Against Apion* 1:8/1:38-41 Josephus reported that no books had been adopted as divine by Palestinian Jews since Persian rule; he describes the books "which contain the records of all the past times which are justly believed to be divine," limits them to "till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia," and specifies "our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of like authority"<sup>1</sup> after that. Josephus's canon was within that re-adopted by Protestants.<sup>2</sup> In 90 C.E., Jewish Rabbis debated some already-accepted books that afterward remained on this list.<sup>3</sup> These events at Jamnia were about justification for the presence of certain books already in the canon.<sup>4</sup> The Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples as Palestinian Jews recognized only this canon, and since the Lord Jesus is "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV) according to 2 Peter 1:1, this was God's canon. This canon had not been added to for over 400 years before Jesus Christ's earthly ministry.

For uncertain reasons, many in the church began using books outside this canon for authoritative Old Testament Scripture as the apostles were passing off the scene. One of these is the forged "Wisdom of Solomon." This and other pre-New Testament books are added to the Old Testament in varying selections by Catholic and Orthodox groups<sup>5</sup> and are called "apocrypha"<sup>6n</sup> by people who do not believe that those books belong there. The fact that the Old Testament canon was closed in ancient times is implied by the late 100's church at Rome. They composed a list of New Testament books now called the Muratorian Canon. In this list, among the New Testament books, they listed "Wisdom of Solomon" as so:

"Of course, the epistle of Jude and two with the title `John' are accepted in the Catholic church, and Wisdom, written by friends of Solomon in his honor. We accept only the apocalypses of John and Peter...."<sup>7</sup>

This suggests that they knew they could not include it in the Old Testament, likely because it had been closed. For books of the Bible, we will limit ourselves to the Palestinian Jews' Old Testament.

The New Testament is a different matter. We will keep to the books meeting these criteria:

1. Use before 150 C.E. in multiple areas of the Christian world;
2. Another document *a*) by a human secretary-author who had a document meeting criteria 1 and was considered worth recopying and circulating, and *b*) this additional document was considered worth recopying and circulating so that it remained after the New Testament period.<sup>8n</sup>

From at least the second century until 397 C.E., there was widespread disagreement on what books to include as New Testament Scripture; the Muratorian Canon quoted above had a canon different from

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<sup>1</sup> Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, page 776.

<sup>2</sup> Filson, *Which Books Belong in the Bible*, page 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Archaeological Study Bible*, page 1552.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler in Berlin, Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, page 2073.

<sup>5</sup> In O'Day, Petersen, *The Access Bible*, pages 28-9.

<sup>6</sup> Originally, this word was from a Greek word suggesting `hidden.' It has come to mean `spurious; inauthentic; does not really belong.'

<sup>7</sup> Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, page 95.

<sup>8</sup> Paul had a letter to the Corinthians written before 1 Corinthians, per 5:9-11, that did not survive. It was apparently not worth preserving to the New Testament church. Luke 1:1 reports "many" (ASV) narratives of church history before Luke+Acts. The New Testament church evidently had some manner of distinguishing between what was normal literature and correspondence versus what was to be held as Scripture and propagated.

most Christians today. It is very often alleged by both Catholic and Orthodox apologists that the church determined what books to recognize as Scriptures in fourth century councils when they were both one body. It must be remembered that these same bodies failed to reject pre-New Testament books entirely from consideration as Scripture when those books were excluded from the Old Testament Scripture of Jesus and His personal disciples. Those church bodies therefore had no credibility in decreeing the New Testament during the fourth century; the earliest criteria possible must be considered. These criteria are the basis for what we should consider the New Testament.

### Our Procedures for Handling Scripture – Initial Basis

We will be guided by the Scriptures put on the top and bottom of each page of this paper. The top, 2 Timothy 3:16a, reminds us Who the ultimate Author of Scripture is. This means that every unit of text in Scripture comes from God. Each unit of text is what God wanted written down for us to read or have read to us. It should be held as the highest authority in any matter that it addresses, and its precepts and approved practices are backed by the wisdom, will, and authority of God Himself.

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

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

Per what this passage examples, some churches have what they call "Individual Soul Liberty." We are shown that Christians are authorized to make some decisions for themselves. James 1:25 refers to the Christian's "perfect law, the law of liberty" (ASV). Again, Christians have some liberty.

Having laid out background information, we now turn directly to 1 Corinthians 4:6. In it, we have something called in Greek "το μη υπερ α γεγραπται" literally translated

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

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

In the larger passage in which this maxim was applied, Paul is rebuking the Corinthian congregation for boasting of following one teacher more than another. The Corinthian Christians by their boasting were teaching that it was better to follow one person as opposed to another. This was a teaching that was beyond what was written in Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Lacueva, Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español, page 665.

<sup>2</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 603.

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

We now come to the conclusion of the meaning of 1 Corinthians 4:6. The maxim means we should not be mandating or `encouraging with maybe a little pressure<sup>1n</sup> any doctrine, practice, or non-practice besides what is explicitly mandated, principled, exemplified, or patterned in Scripture.

The Restoration slogan "Where Scripture speaks, we speak; where Scripture is silent, we are silent" is a fitting interpretation of the passage. Combined with "Individual Soul Liberty," we can form a basis for Christian non-disagreement. We should only require of believers what is clearly mandated, patterned, or exemplified in Scripture; we should leave them on their liberty to carefully interpret the Scriptures for how to follow those principles outside of what is explicitly written. They will be responsible to God and Him alone for how they do this. This is GOD'S jurisdiction -- not ours; God does not need or authorize `little helpers' in this regard, and actually Romans 14:1-12 suggests a `mind your own business' approach among us.

### Deciding the Text of Scripture – Part I of III: Introduction and Old Testament

Both the Old Testament and New Testaments have multiple text-types. A text-type is a form of text. Manuscripts belonging to one text form will generally agree with each other in certain ways against manuscripts outside that text class. This is *not* to say that they *always* agree, *but* that they *generally* agree. The differences in text-types, which we will often call TEXT CLASSES, are typically minor. For example, the difference between one New Testament Greek text class and another at John 5:16 is simply word order.<sup>2</sup> Many, sadly, make a division about the text classes, claiming that Christians must follow only one and reject the others. Therefore, they must be addressed.

For the Old Testament, there was a text class translated into Greek as the Septuagint translation. Another text class became the basis for what is called the Masoretic Text, standardized by Jewish authorities in the Middle Ages and the basis for most Old Testament translations. Before the New Testament was written, the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded at John 10:35 saying "a Escritura não pode falhar" (ARA) = "the Scripture no/not <=> it-can fail"; it cannot fail to be accurate, and is also translated more directly "as Escrituras Sagradas sempre dizem a verdade" (NTLH) = "the Scriptures Sacred always they-say the truth." Jesus was referring to what is now the Jewish Old Testament, which was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. The Septuagint translated a Hebrew text form attested to by 5% of the Dead Sea Scrolls from the first century C.E. and before, while proto-Masoretic-type manuscripts composed 60% of the Bible manuscripts in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>3</sup> At Jesus' time, there was variation in the manuscripts of His Scriptures, yet He still held them to be authoritative. *To Jesus, variation in manuscripts did not in any way compromise the authority of Scripture.*

Paul thought similarly. In quoting the Old Testament, Paul used both the Hebrew text common to us now and the Septuagint.<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew text common to us now is Masoretic, built on the proto-Masoretic text class, and the Septuagint was based upon the Septuagint text class. Paul used both text classes. Naturally, since God is ultimately the Author of Scripture, this means God used both text classes even though one was certainly closer to the original text than the other.

The Proto-Masoretic Text is most likely closest to the original text. Why? As we saw, it is in the majority of surviving manuscripts from the New Testament era and the last few centuries prior.

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

<sup>2</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 305.

<sup>3</sup> Schiffman, Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls, page 172.

<sup>4</sup> Open Bible, page 1211.



### Deciding the Text of Scripture – Part II of III: The New Testament Problem

The New Testament quarrel gets nasty. There are three New Testament text classes. One is the Byzantine text class. It was the only one known during the Reformation period, so translations such as the King James Version in English and the Reina-Valera translation tradition in Spanish all draw predominantly from Byzantine-type texts. In the 1800's, manuscript discoveries confirmed the existence of the so-called "Alexandrian" text class, common in ancient times. A third text class is the Western text class, which most ancient translations followed. The people who are most quarrelsome about the New Testament text class issue are typically those who exclusively trust the Byzantine text.

In *Part 1/The Ancient Texts* we discussed passages that indicate that God would preserve His Word. Many Byzantine text supporters, often appealing much to preservation, actually deny it by claiming that the similar text classes are much more different than they are, and that Christian doctrine is threatened by ancient manuscripts the Lord has allowed to survive.

Typically, the nastiness involves accusations against people that simply are not true. Reuben J. Clark throughout his book calls those who follow ancient text bases "Extreme Textualists." He writes at one place "one can but wonder if there be not behind this movement of the Extreme Textualists a deliberate purpose and intent to destroy the Christian faith."<sup>1</sup>

The English Revised Version was published in 1881, the same year of a similar Greek text by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort.<sup>2n</sup> The 1881 RV had at Mark 3:34-5 "For whosoever shall do..." from *Ὁς γὰρ ἀν προπηση* while the Westcott-Hort Greek text had *Ὁς ἀν προπηση* which would equate to "Who|soever shall do..."<sup>3</sup> because γὰρ = "for."<sup>4</sup> The Revisers did not subscribe to the Westcott-Hort text as a whole.<sup>5n</sup>

Let us examine what real enemies of Bible-based Christianity write, and compare them to writings from early influential pre-Westcott-Hort "Extreme Textualists." The 1990's Jesus Seminar boasted that they rejected 82% of Jesus' words recorded in the Gospels as fake,<sup>6</sup> and wrote

"The seventh and final pillar that supports the edifice of contemporary gospel scholarship is the reversal that has taken place regarding who bears the burden of proof. It was once assumed that scholars had to prove that the details in the synoptic gospels were not historical"

finishing that thought "The current assumption is now more nearly the opposite."<sup>7</sup>

The Jesus Seminar assumes that gospel narratives are historically inaccurate unless shown otherwise. Many non-Christian liberal theologians know that if they can collapse people's belief in Scripture, other denials of Christian beliefs and of biblical morality will be easier to advance. Constantine Tischendorf in the 1800's opposed them. He was an editor of an 1800's Greek text based on the "Alexandrian" text class,<sup>8n</sup> but against opponents of the Bible he wrote

"May my writing serve this end, to make you mistrust those novel theories upon, or rather against, the Gospels, which would persuade you that the wonderful details which the Gospels give us of our gracious Saviour, are founded on ignorance or deceit."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Clark, Why the King James Version, page 126.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott, Brooke Foss and Fenton John Anthony Hort. The New Testament in the Original Greek, American Edition. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament, page 109|KJV, ASV and British RV counterpart.

<sup>4</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 246.

<sup>5</sup> Palmer, E.. The Greek New Testament with the Readings Adopted by the Revisers of the Authorised Version. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881.

"The body of the text in this volume is taken from the third edition of Stephanus, published in 1550" - page v. This base text was emended to what the RV translated.

<sup>6</sup> Funk, Hoover, et al, The Five Gospels, page 5.

<sup>7</sup> Funk, Hoover, et al, The Five Gospels, page 4.

<sup>8</sup> Tischendorf, Constantinus. Novum Testamentum Graece. Three Volumes. Lipsiae: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869.

<sup>9</sup> Tischendorf, When Were Our Gospels Written?, pages 118-9.

He elsewhere protested against "the historic attacks which have been made upon the authenticity of the evangelical sources. Here we have to protest with the utmost decisiveness, but on the ground of rigid scientific investigation."<sup>1</sup>

C. Tischendorf upheld authenticity of the Gospels, unlike the 1990's Jesus Seminar. Samuel P. Tregelles edited another pre-Westcott-Hort Greek text<sup>2n</sup> in the 1800's based upon the Alexandrian text form's testimony. He wrote "we have to maintain the Scripture as God's revealed truth"<sup>3</sup> and

"Definite grounds of testimony are equally opposed to the growing evil of rationalism under its various forms. Some seek to meet this evil by the claims of Church authority :-let them rather be met by the authority of God in his word. Whatever would cast doubt or uncertainty upon Scripture, is answered by the distinct evidence which carries us back to the age of the Apostles. We may thus hold forth the New Testament, maintaining its claims."<sup>4</sup>

This is opposed to the likes of the 1990's Jesus Seminar. The impetus for starting ancient text-based textual study was not the destruction of the basic doctrine of the Bible's authority, upon which proper Christian doctrine rests. Douglas Stauffer writes regarding F. J. A. Hort and B. F. Westcott

"the two men had to come up with a completely subjective text influenced by their heretical views. Consequently, they wrote an 'eclectic' text, meaning that they preferentially picked and chose certain portions of scripture from the Vaticanus manuscript and other portions from the Sinaiticus manuscript until they produced a rendering that satisfactorily conveyed their doctrines."<sup>5</sup>

The views of these two may be open to question, but **the biblical conservatism of Constantine Tischendorf and Samuel Tregelles before them is not in question.** C. Tischendorf saw both Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus and S. Tregelles saw Vaticanus.<sup>6</sup> S. Tregelles was dissatisfied with J. Griesbach's reluctance to diverge from the Byzantine text and pioneered placing ancient manuscripts first,<sup>7</sup> but clearly not to subvert Scripture. *It is sad that some are so reckless as to characterize as enemies of biblical conservatism men who actually devoted substantial efforts of their lives for it.*

Now, let us examine the matter of the Greek New Testament text classes themselves. Allegations that the so-called "Alexandrian" text class was a product of Gnostic non-Christians are very speculative.<sup>8n</sup> We do not know who made these manuscripts. KJV advocate D. A. Waite condemns the main "Alexandrian" type manuscripts as "the false Vatican ('B') and Sinai ('Aleph') Gnostic Greek manuscripts"<sup>9</sup> and KJV advocate Gail Riplinger describes "Catholics and unwary Protestants, with their Gnostic Vatican manuscript under their arm."<sup>10</sup> Contrary to the general claim, Gnosticism was not similar enough to Christianity to be legitimately teachable from New Testament manuscripts and Gnostics had to create their own set of "scriptures,"<sup>11n</sup> but as for this specific claim, a

<sup>1</sup> Tischendorf, Origin of the Four Gospels, page 219.

<sup>2</sup> Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux. The Greek New Testament. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1857-79.

<sup>3</sup> Tregelles, An Account of the Printed Greek Text of the New Testament, page viii.

<sup>4</sup> Tregelles, A Lecture on the Historic Evidence of the Authorship and Transmission of the Books of the New Testament, page 94.

<sup>5</sup> Stauffer, One Book Stands Alone, page 285.

<sup>6</sup> Holland, Crowned With Glory, page 36.

<sup>7</sup> Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, page 125.

<sup>8</sup> Early church writers reported vile readings put in Scripture manuscripts by unbelievers, but which have since vanished from the manuscript tradition.\*

\* Burgon, Miller, The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text, page 139.

<sup>9</sup> Waite, The Case for the King James Bible, pages 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Riplinger, New Age Bible Versions, page 498.

<sup>11</sup> For example, in forged *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus is purported to say at Logion 14 "if you pray, you will be condemned."\* 1 Thessalonians 5:17 in Alexandrian-type Codex Vaticanus says differently: *Ἀδιαλειπτως προσευχεσθε* † = "pray constantly" (HCSB).

\* Robinson, The Nag Hammadi Library in English, page 128.

† In Maius, Codex Vaticanus Novum Testamentum Graece, page 133

counterexample should suffice. At Romans 5:8 the main Alexandrian-type codex, Codex Vaticanus, has  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma \upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho \eta\mu\omega\nu \alpha\pi\epsilon\theta\alpha\nu\epsilon\nu$ <sup>1</sup> translated "Christ died on our behalf" (TCNT). Gnostics would have liked to have their Bible manuscripts deny or omit that the Christ of God underwent a physical death. This manuscript would not have been favorable to them.

The New Testament text has never been preserved as a stream that never had any changes. The most closely agreeing manuscripts vary six to ten times per modern chapter.<sup>2</sup> Appearances of Scripture frequently cited as similar to the traditional English King James Version such as the Syriac Peshitta, the Gothic translation, older Byzantine-type manuscripts, the majority of Greek manuscripts, the traditional Eastern and Greek Orthodox church's text, Reformation-era printed Greek texts, older English translations, and Reformation-era foreign translations all differ in source Greek text from the King James Version, which itself underwent change in source Greek text.

The Syriac Peshitta, third century or before,<sup>3n</sup> traditionally universally received by the Syriac church, also differs in source text from the KJV, as does the Gothic translation<sup>4n</sup> of Europe from the mid-fourth century C.E.. At Luke 2:22 the Syriac Peshitta has "their purification"<sup>5</sup> like the translation into Gothic by Ulfilas and most Greek manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> The King James Version agrees with the same text here that the Latin Vulgate followed<sup>7</sup> for "her purification" (KJV; DRV) but the Syriac Peshitta and the Gothic translation follow the same Greek text as the early 1500's New Testament translations by William Tyndale, which had "their purification" in the 1526 edition.

We now consider the oldest Byzantine manuscripts. Those with the oldest form of Byzantine text had the name  $\iota\omega\alpha\kappa\epsilon\iota\mu$  at Matthew 1:11<sup>8</sup> which appears transliterated as "Iacim" in the 1568 Bishops' Bible, and as "Iakim" in the 1611 KJV margin "Some read, Iosias begate Iakim, and Iakim begat Iechonias" = "Some read, Josias begat Jakim, and Jakim begat Jechonias." Here, the KJV text itself differs from the oldest Byzantine-type manuscripts because it has no "Iakim" = "Jakim."

The majority of manuscripts also do not always agree with the traditional English King James Version. One such place was recognized by the 1611 KJV translators at Luke 17:36, where the margin has "This 36. verse is wanting in most of the Greek copies." The modern Majority Text also lacks the verse (NKJV margin) thousands of known manuscripts later. Most manuscripts do not have what is now Acts 8:37,<sup>9</sup> not all with parts of it have the whole (AmerV margin), and it is not present in any of the ancient manuscripts from before the year 500.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ornsby, The Greek Testament, from Cardinal Mai's Edition of the Vatican Bible, page 339.

<sup>2</sup> W. Edward Glenny in Beacham, Bauder, One Bible Only?, page 82.

<sup>3</sup> The Peshitta was originally for Jews.\* As early as the close of the fourth century, church writer Theodore of Mospuestia wrote "It has been translated into the tongue of the Syrians by someone or other, for it has not been learned up to the present time who this was."\*\*\* The Peshitta was so old that even an adult from the last decades of the fourth century knew of no one who knew of who made it.

However, Hegessipus quoted from a non-Peshitta Syriac translation in the mid-100's.<sup>†</sup>

\* Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler in The Jewish Study Bible, page 2071.

\*\* Wegner, The Journey from Texts to Translations, page 245.

† Geisler, Nix, From God to Us, page 79.

<sup>4</sup> The Gothic translation followed a predominantly Byzantine text for the New Testament.\* Regarding the Old Testament, a few decades after Ulfilas's translation work in the mid-fourth century, church historian Philostorgius reported that Ulfilas left out the entire Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings for fear it would encourage the Goths' warlike tendencies.<sup>†</sup>

\* Berrera, The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible, page 362.

† Wegner, The Journey from Texts to Translations, page 258.

<sup>5</sup> Lamsa, The Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text, page 1015.

<sup>6</sup> Moorman, Early Manuscripts and the Authorized Version - A Closer Look, page 86.

<sup>7</sup> Moorman, Early Manuscripts and the Authorized Version - A Closer Look, page 86.

<sup>8</sup> Von Soden, Die Schriften Des Neuen Testaments, page 2:1.

<sup>9</sup> J. White, The King James Only Controversy, page 63; Hills, The King James Version Defended, page 154.

<sup>10</sup> In Sayão, Novo Testamento Trilíngüe: Grego, Português, Inglês, page 415.

The Eastern and Greek Orthodox churches have used the Byzantine text exclusively from antiquity.<sup>1</sup> At Matthew 23:25, the Orthodox text has ἀδικία<sup>2</sup> = "unrighteousness"<sup>3</sup> where the KJV follows ἀκρασία<sup>4</sup> for "excess." The Orthodox text does not always agree with the majority of manuscripts; at Matthew 27:41 most manuscripts mention φαρισαίων<sup>5</sup> "Pharisees" (NKJVMg) among those who mock Jesus at the cross, but the Orthodox text does not.<sup>6</sup>

The first printed Greek New Testament to be published was by Desiderius Erasmus and this happened in 1516. The most influential printed Greek text to be published in the Reformation period was the 1550 edition of Robert Stephanus. At James 2:18 the texts of Desiderius Erasmus and Robert Stephanus go "by thy works" vs. KJV "without thy works."<sup>7</sup> The older texts have here ἐκ τῶν ἐργῶν σου<sup>8</sup> and the KJV followed χωρὶς τῶν ἐργῶν σου.<sup>9</sup> From this variation, we have disagreement between the KJV and older Reformation-era translations. The 1611 KJV matched the Latin Vulgate's "without" (DRV): "||without thy workes" with margin note "||Some copies reade, by thy workes." In contrast, the German Bible translation of Martin Luther had in his 1545 revision "mit deinen werken" = "with your works" and the 1535 Olivetan Bible in French had "par tes oeuvres" spelled now "par tes oeuvres" = "by thy works" and the 1526 William Tyndale New Testament in English had "by thy dedes" now spelled "by thy deeds."

In the English Bible, the KJV differs in text from all of its predecessors. At Revelation 16:5 the KJV has "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because" (KJV). There is no future tense in older English translations; rather, the Lord is called "holy":

1560 Geneva Bible: "Lord, Thou art iust, Which art, and Which wast : and holy, because" [GenB]

Tyndale Testament: "lorde whych arte, and wast, thou arte ryghteous and holy, because" [1526]

1539 Great Bible: "Lorde whych art, and wast, thou arte righteous and holy, bicause" [1539]

1568 Bishops' Bible: "Lorde, which art, and wast, thou art righteous & holy, because" [BishB].

Further, the 1535 French Olivetan Bible followed this reading for "saint" today spelled "saint" = "holy," Martin Luther's 1545 revision of his German Luther Bible has "heilig" = "holy," and the 1569 Reina/Reyna Bible in Spanish has "sancto" today spelled "santo" = "holy" and the 1602 Valera revision has the same. There is a reason why the KJV does not translate a Greek reading in agreement with its predecessors both foreign and in English here. The reading followed by the King James Version translators here was a conjecture of Theodore Beza from the late 1500's.<sup>10</sup> In this conjecture, it was implicitly believed that the original text of Scripture here was not preserved in such a way that the original text here could be found among surviving manuscripts. The manuscript discoveries numbering in the thousands since that time have still not turned up a manuscript with the conjectured Greek text which the KJV followed at Revelation 16:5.

We turn to the fact that the KJV has further disagreements with foreign Reformation-era translations besides what has already been noted. At Matthew 26:26 the 1543 Spanish New Testament of Francisco de Enzinas differed from the KJV and Latin Vulgate, translated "blessed" (DRV) and "bendijo" (Amat) = "He-blessed"; the Enzinas New Testament of 1543 had "quando vbo hecho gratias"<sup>11</sup> = "quando hubo hecho gracias" = "when He-had done thanks," in contrast to 1611 KJV "||blessed it" with margin note "||Many Greeke copies haue gaue thanks" = "||Many Greek copies have gave thanks." At 2 Timothy 1:18 the KJV and Latin Vulgate agree with a few

<sup>1</sup> In J. Allen, et al, Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament, page x.

<sup>2</sup> In Zodhiates, Complete Word Study New Testament With, page 87.

<sup>3</sup> Farstad, Hodges, et al, NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament, page 90.

<sup>4</sup> Green, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 698.

<sup>5</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 99.

<sup>6</sup> In Zodhiates, Complete Word Study New Testament With, page 110.

<sup>7</sup> J. White, The King James Only Controversy, page 68.

<sup>8</sup> G. Berry, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 588.

<sup>9</sup> Green, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 698.

<sup>10</sup> J. White, The King James Only Controversy, page 63; Hills, The King James Version Defended, page 208.

<sup>11</sup> Noted by Bill Kincaid <<http://www.west.ga.net/~ForHim/Word.html>>, October 1999.

manuscripts' text (NKJV margin) διηκονησε μοι<sup>1</sup> for "ministered vnto me" per the 1611 KJV and the Latin Vulgate translated "ministered unto me" (DRV) with μοι = me<sup>2</sup>; most manuscripts have simply διηκονησε translated in the 1569 Spanish Bible of Casiodoro de Reina/Cassiodoro de Reyna, as "nos ayudó = "us he-helped" with "nos" italicized as an indication of being supplied to clarify the Greek. The 1602 Revisión of Cypriano/Cipriano de Valera and the Revisiónes of 1862, 1909, 1960, 1995 all have the same Spanish text - as does an 1865 American KJV-based alteration.<sup>3n</sup> This is at variance with Spanish translations of the Latin Vulgate which agree with the KJV here: the thirteenth century Spanish New Testament had "seruicio me fizo"<sup>4</sup> = "servicio me hizo" = "service to-me he-did," and the Amat Version has "servicios me prestó" = "services to-me he-gave" in agreement with KJV "ministered unto me" at 2 Timothy 1:18. Behold also Matthew 27:41

Traditional Reina-Valera [RVR 1909]	1602 Valera Bible	Translated Into English
"De esta manera también los príncipes de los sacerdotes, escarneciendo con los escribas y los Fariseos y los ancianos, decían"	"Dešte manera tambien los principes de los Sacerdotes ešcarneciendo, con los Ešcribas, y los Pharišeos, y los Ancianos, dezian"	Of-this manner also the principals of the Priests mocking, with the Scribes, and the Pharisees, and the Elders, they-were-saying

The King James Version does not mention the Pharisees here, but most Greek manuscripts do (NKJV margin). The Portuguese D'Almeida Bible's New Testament finished in 1681 had "Phariseos" in the 1693 edition and this is updated "fariseus" in the ARC and AEC. Also, the 1602 edition of the Geneva Bible has an old spelling "Pharises" here, and the Italian Bible of Giovanni Diodati finished in 1607, while the KJV was being made 1604-11, has "Farisei" = "Pharisees." In addition, at Ephesians 3:9 the KJV follows a Greek word meaning "fellowship" but other Greek manuscripts have a word meaning "stewardship" (NKJV margin) which also means "dispensation"<sup>5</sup>; in disagreement with its contemporary the KJV, the 1607 Diodati Bible has "dispensazione" updated in later editions as "dispensazion" = "dispensation."

Finally, after the KJV was finished in 1611, there were changes made, including in underlying Greek text. At John 16:25<sup>6</sup> the 1611 KJV had "prouerbs : the time" and the 1638 KJV had "proverbs : the time" where the 1769 KJV has "proverbs: but the time"; "but" is from αλλ.<sup>7</sup> The 1550 Robert Stephanus Greek text had υμιν αλλ ερχεται but the older Desiderius Erasmus Greek text of 1516 had merely υμιν ερχεται. The 1611 KJV has "These things haue I spoken vnto you in ||prouerbs : the time commeth when I shall no more speake vnto you in || prouerbs" with "||" referring to margin notes with alternative translation "||Or, parables." The current 1769 edition of the KJV text has a "but," and the 1611 KJV does not have it nor does the 1638 KJV at the focal point: "proverbs : the time" which only changes the spelling of the 1611 edition. The 1568 Bishops' Bible 1602 edition, upon which the KJV was based,<sup>8</sup> had "prouerbs : the time" but the 1602 edition of the Geneva Bible had "parables : but the time" (GenB), so by excluding "but" the 1611 KJV rejected the source reading of the 1769 KJV. The 1611 KJV evidently followed the Bishops' Bible; both matched the text that Desiderius Erasmus adopted in 1516 here, and the 1769 KJV matches the influential Robert Stephanus text of 1550 here.

All Reformation-era New Testament translations and Greek texts followed the Byzantine class, yet all differed. There is no textual tradition that comes to us without variation from the first century.

<sup>1</sup> Farstad, Hodges, et al, NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament, page 735.

<sup>2</sup> Farstad, Hodges, et al, NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament, page 735.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, this 1865 alteration, done outside the Spanish-speaking world, rejected all Greek manuscript testimony at Revelation 16:5 in favor of the conjectured reading followed in the KJV. Rather than continue from Valera 1602 "sancto" = "santo" = "holy," it has "serás" = "you-will-be." This agrees with the KJV, but not with any Greek manuscript or the translations of Reina 1569 or Valera 1602.

<sup>4</sup> Nuevo Testamento: Versión Castellana de hacia 1260, page 367.

<sup>5</sup> Young, Young's Analytical Concordance, page *Index-Lexicon...New Testament* 81.

<sup>6</sup> This variation was noticed at [www.bible-researcher.com/kjv.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/kjv.html), July 2003.

<sup>7</sup> G. Berry, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 295.

<sup>8</sup> In Metzger, Murphy, The New Oxford Annotated Bible, page 402 NT.

Deciding the Text of Scripture – Part III of III: The New Testament Solution

Even before the third century which we examined, there was manuscript variation. There are three text classes for the Greek New Testament which were recognized as early as 1796 by J. J. Griesbach.<sup>1</sup> The "Textus Receptus" tradition did exist before the KJV; the "Textus Receptus" for pre-1881 times referred to a procession of printed Greek New Testament texts which started in 1516, none of which matched the source text for the KJV in all places. In 1881, F. H. A. Scrivener created a Greek Testament edited from the KJV, attempting to reproduce the Greek text that the KJV translators followed; he wrote "the Authorised Version was not a translation of any one Greek text then in existence, and no Greek text intended to reproduce in any way the original of the Authorised Version has ever been printed"<sup>2</sup> as of then. Before F. H. A. Scrivener's 1881 Greek text, the closest printed Greek text to the KJV was Theodore Beza's 1598 edition with between 190 and 200 differences.<sup>3</sup> After F. H. A. Scrivener edited his artificial<sup>4n</sup> 1611 KJV-based text in 1881, a medieval manuscript called Ω = Omega was found to resemble it at over 90%.<sup>5</sup> This is the Byzantine text class.

There is a parallel in the so-called "Alexandrian" text class. Codex Vaticanus is a mid-300's manuscript found in Europe, although the Vatican secluded its contents for centuries<sup>6</sup> likely due to its differences with the Latin Vulgate. An older manuscript was found in Egypt during the 1900's, and it is called Papyrus #75 = P75. P75 and Codex Vaticanus, at their common surviving parts,<sup>7n</sup> agree over 90%.<sup>8</sup> This is reminiscent of Omega and the KJV source text both of which are in the Byzantine text class; the so-called "Alexandrian" text class is a parallel from ancient times.

The so-called "Alexandrian" text is really not local to the Egypt area. An 1815 opponent of it rejected the name "Alexandrine" preferring instead "Palestine Text."<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Palestine was where the church began. Codex Sinaiticus is another mid-300's manuscript with so-called "Alexandrian" text. It was found on the Sinai Peninsula in the 1800's, but altered at Caesarea in northern Palestine the 500's-600's,<sup>10</sup> suggesting a southbound path and a possible origin even farther north than Caesarea in Syria. Europe-found Codex Ephraemi from the fifth century C. E. contains a mixed text involving both Alexandrian<sup>11</sup> and Byzantine readings.<sup>12</sup> A 300's manuscript found in Europe is considered the lead manuscript of the so-called "Alexandrian" text; this manuscript, Codex Vaticanus, was found on the opposite side of the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt. The so-called "Alexandrian" text refers to an ancient text that was *WIDESPREAD* in ancient times.

The third text class is the Western Text and less well-defined. Western text class manuscripts tend to have expansions – not all of which are shared even by each other. In the Western Text, Acts is about 10% longer with many readings never put in English translations.<sup>13</sup> However, in Luke 24, Codex Bezae of c. 400 C.E.<sup>14</sup> and the Greek manuscripts which the 100's Old Latin version translated

<sup>1</sup> Hills, The King James Version Defended, pages 65, 126.

<sup>2</sup> Scrivener, The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Text Followed in the Authorised Version Together with the Variations Adopted in the Revised Version, pages vii.

<sup>3</sup> Scrivener, The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Text Followed in the Authorised Version Together with the Variations Adopted in the Revised Version, pages vii-ix.

<sup>4</sup> The reason this is "artificial" is because it was not an attempt to represent the original Greek text; the reconstruction of this text from Greek texts current up to 1611 and information current in 1611 was made primarily for historical inquiry.

<sup>5</sup> Zane C. Hodges article in Fuller, Which Bible?, page 33.

<sup>6</sup> In Throckmorton, Gospel Parallels, pages viii-ix.

<sup>7</sup> As common of artifacts, Codex Vaticanus and other ancient manuscripts are missing parts of their original contents -- Scrivener, Plain Introduction, pages 87-8, 95, 102.

<sup>8</sup> Zane C. Hodges article in Fuller, Which Bible?, page 33.

<sup>9</sup> Nolan, Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate, page 105.

<sup>10</sup> Geisler, Nix, From God to Us, page 147.

<sup>11</sup> Aland, Aland, Text of the New Testament, page 160; in Throckmorton, Gospel Parallels, page ix; Metzger, Textual Commentary, page xxix.

<sup>12</sup> Kenyon, Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, page 326.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Minnick in Williams, Shaylor, God's Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us, page 242.

<sup>14</sup> Vaganay, Amphoux, An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism, page 16.

agree in seven omissions not made in the other text classes.<sup>1</sup> In Clement of Alexandria's late second century writings, his Scripture quotes at places of textual variation have a close match with Codex Bezae, but only around half for the other two text forms.<sup>2</sup> 200's C.E. P38 substantially matches Codex Bezae,<sup>3</sup> and 400's P112 has a text of Codex Bezae's type.<sup>4</sup> These show the Western text.<sup>5n</sup>

One should make little of differences in text class.<sup>6n</sup> Polycarp<sup>7n</sup> was a pupil of the apostle John, and his *Epistle to the Philippians* quotes passages that vary among text classes; these quotes match multiple text classes,<sup>8</sup> suggesting he was not taught to be strict about text form. Western text Codex Bezae agrees "far more" with "Alexandrian" text manuscripts than it disagrees.<sup>9</sup> The modern Byzantine KJV-based "Textus Receptus," Byzantine Majority Text, and "Alexandrian" text match "fully" 85%.<sup>10</sup> It would be an unwise claim to say of English translations that the KJV and early 1500's William Tyndale New Testaments were substantially different. 80% of W. Tyndale's text was adopted in the KJV.<sup>11</sup> While these were similar, the Byzantine and so-called "Alexandrian" Greek text classes are even more similar in text.

There are ways to determine which text class is most likely to represent the original New Testament text. There is archaeological evidence of early medieval and ancient manuscripts.<sup>12n</sup> From no time do surviving manuscripts show the Western text to have been the majority of manuscripts. While most manuscripts to survive are Byzantine, they also come from after 1000 C.E.. The surviving manuscripts of the first millennium give no Byzantine manuscripts of Paul's epistles for the first eight centuries C.E.,<sup>13</sup> and the surviving manuscripts show that the so-called "Alexandrian" text was the majority text<sup>14n</sup> in every century from which we have manuscripts for the first eight centuries C.E..<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aland et al, The Greek New Testament: United Bible Societies' Fourth Corrected Edition, pages 306-11.

<sup>2</sup> Holland, Crowned with Glory, page 30.

<sup>3</sup> R. Clark, Why the King James Version, pages 217-8.

<sup>4</sup> Comfort, Essential Guide to Bible Versions, page 82.

<sup>5</sup> A common speculation among radical KJV-likers is that the "Alexandrian" text in 50 lost copies of Scripture from Eusebius. This is unlikely. His Bible quotations show that he preferred the Western text -- Lake, The Text of the New Testament, page 51.

<sup>6</sup> This excludes apocryphal narratives added into the gospels, like after Mark 16:8. For this one, the two oldest Greek manuscripts plus another lack such narration, as do some manuscripts of multiple ancient translations, and some Greek manuscripts present alternative narration -- J. White, King James Only Controversy, page 255.

<sup>7</sup> Polycarp was not a monarchical bishop. Polycarp described himself in a letter as "Polycarp and the presbyters with him"\* -- he saw himself as one of several presbyters.

\*In Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers, page 207.

<sup>8</sup> Based on Greek text and Scripture quotes noted in Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers, pages 207-221.

<sup>9</sup> Lightfoot, How We Got the Bible, page 59.

<sup>10</sup> Preface to the New King James Version as found in SOME editions of the NKJV.

<sup>11</sup> Ryken, The Word of God in English, page 48.

<sup>12</sup> Isolated variants in a manuscript that match another text class are not evidence on text class. Evidence on text class of a manuscript is from its NORMAL agreements.

<sup>13</sup> W. Edward Glenny in Beacham, Bauder, One Bible Only?, page 106.

<sup>14</sup> Byzantine text supporters often claim: the reason so-called "Alexandrian"-type manuscripts survived is that they were promptly discarded, while Byzantine-type manuscripts were worn out from use. This is unlikely; the Byzantine text gets least use among the ancient translations from the first three centuries C.E..\* Only one uses the Byzantine text: the Syriac Peshitta. The Old Latin, the two Old Syriac translations, and the two Coptic translations are based on other text classes.

"Alexandrian" text Codex Sinaiticus has markings on it from user after user.<sup>†</sup> Codex Sinaiticus has markings from users up to the twelfth century and Ephraemi has these up to the ninth century,<sup>††</sup> and Vaticanus has such up to c.1000.<sup>‡</sup> Clearly, these manuscripts were anything but promptly considered too corrupt for use.

\* Epp, Fee, Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism, page 187.

† in Green, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page viii.

†† Aland, et al, Novum Testamentum Graece, page 48\*.

‡ In Monser, The Cross-Reference Bible (American Standard Version) with..., page xv.

<sup>15</sup> In Ehrman, Holmes, The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research, page 311.

We also have surviving evidence from the New Testament era and the decades afterward. First, we discuss the manuscript evidence. None of the Dead Sea Scrolls can be any later than 68 C.E., when the settlement at Qumran in Palestine was fled, and among those is 7Q5, part of Mark 6:52-3.<sup>1n</sup> The surviving part of the second line has τω<sup>2</sup> followed by a damaged letter which seems to be ν.<sup>3</sup> The surviving part of the third line has the end of an η, then και, then τ, then another letter, possibly ι.<sup>4</sup> The original editors of 7Q5, M. Baillet, J. Milik, and R. de Vaux reported νησ in line 4.<sup>5</sup> The surviving part of the last line has θη.<sup>6</sup> The τ of the third line is the beginning of the word διαπεράσαντες<sup>7</sup> = "crossing over"<sup>8</sup>; some first century Greek scribes liked to spell the soft "δ" with a "τ" or a "θ," as was done in a warning stone for foreigners at the Jewish temple<sup>9</sup> destroyed in 70 C.E., and the scribal practice was continued in twenty biblical manuscripts<sup>10</sup> including P4<sup>11</sup> from between 150 and 175 C.E.<sup>12</sup>

The surviving parts of the last two lines are important. The letters νησ are part of the word Γεννησαρετ = "Gennesaret" (ASV) and the θη must be part of the word προσωρμισθησαν = "anchored there" (TNIV) at Mark 6:53 in the ancient manuscripts except for Codex Bezae of the Western text and Codex Washington<sup>13</sup> which is Western in Mark. The Old Latin, which translated Western text manuscripts older than Bezae, also lacks equivalent to that word.<sup>14</sup> 7Q5 includes the word rendered "anchored there" in the TNIV as do the manuscripts of the non-Western text classes, but that word is omitted in the Western text class. Hence, 7Q5, from the New Testament period, testifies against the Western text. By elimination, it would favor the Byzantine and so-called "Alexandrian" texts.

P52 has similarity in handwriting style to first century non-New Testament manuscripts, especially to one from c. 100, naturally suggesting a date of c. 100.<sup>15</sup> Much of the manuscript is lost, but parts of John 18:33 survive. At one point, Byzantine text class manuscripts have Greek word order εις το πραιτωριον παλιν<sup>16</sup> rendered "into the Praetorium again" (NKJV) while "Alexandrian" text class manuscripts have παλιν εις το πραιτωριον<sup>17</sup> rendered "again into the Praetorium" (ASV, NASB). In both text classes, these words appear immediately before ο Πιλατος, the mention of Pilate. The second line of the surviving manuscript starts with "ριον" and then

<sup>1</sup> Not all accept 7Q5 as a fragment of Mark; being inclined to date New Testament writings as late as possible, some speculate that 7Q5 belongs to an unknown work. The surviving text matches Mark closely, and no other known ancient writing matches the surviving text. It seems more prudent to remain within known ancient works.

Second, it is suggested that if 7Q5 is of Mark 6:52-3, then three short Greek words were omitted outside of the surviving part of the fragment. Again, this is speculation; we know nothing about the parts of the manuscript which do not survive. Perhaps the words were never there, OR perhaps the margins were generous and they were but due to an oversight the scribe wrote a longer line than usual to the right, or started farther back left on the left side than usual for the next line, or wrote smaller, or a combination of these mentioned possibilities. We cannot know; there is no reason to make statements on the fragment's text where the paper has not survived.

We will refrain from speculation about lost works and about parts of the manuscript that have been lost, and accept that 7Q5 is a scrap of Mark 6:52-3.

<sup>2</sup> Stanton, *Gospel Truth?*, plate 7.

<sup>3</sup> Thiede, D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, page 42.

<sup>4</sup> Stanton, *Gospel Truth?*, page 27.

<sup>5</sup> Thiede, D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, pages 32-3, 174.

<sup>6</sup> Stanton, *Gospel Truth?*, page 27.

<sup>7</sup> Thiede, D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, page 38.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall, *Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament*, page 121.

<sup>9</sup> Thiede, D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, page 38.

<sup>10</sup> Thiede, D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, page 39.

<sup>11</sup> Thiede, D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus*, page 39.

<sup>12</sup> Comfort, Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest Greek New Testament Manuscripts*, page 53.

<sup>13</sup> Nestle, Aland, et al, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, page 110.

<sup>14</sup> Nestle, Aland, et al, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, page 110.

<sup>15</sup> Comfort, Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest Greek New Testament Manuscripts*, page 367.

<sup>16</sup> G. Berry, *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, page 300.

<sup>17</sup> Marshall, *Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament*, page 326.



continues with "ο π" followed by a lost edge.<sup>1</sup> The ριον is the end of πραιτωριον and precedes "ο π" the beginning of ο Πιλατος. Hence, P52 demonstrates "Alexandrian" text here.

We come to P46 of Egypt from the late first to early second century,<sup>2</sup> or c. 100, the same period as P52. P46 has most of Paul's epistles and Hebrews. It is of the so-called "Alexandrian" text family.<sup>3</sup> G. Zuntz reported only nine distinctively Western readings from Hebrews and 1 Corinthians in P46.<sup>4</sup> Among the variants between the Alexandrian text and Byzantine Majority Text in Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad's *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*,<sup>5n</sup> there were 32 instances between Romans and 1 Thessalonians inclusive plus Hebrews where P46 lined up alone among ancient manuscripts with the Majority Text in supporting distinctively Byzantine readings; in contrast, there were over 200 instances where P46 lined up with Codex Vaticanus against the Majority Text in just Romans and 1 Corinthians alone, not including the rest of P46. Hence, P46 supports a contention that at least the majority of manuscripts c. 100 were of so-called "Alexandrian" text.

This is confirmed in Europe by a letter "the church of God which sojourns in Rome to the church of God which sojourns in Corinth"<sup>6</sup> later named *1 Clement* and written in the late first century.<sup>7n</sup> I compared the allusions to New Testament Scripture noted in Michael W. Holmes's *The*

<sup>1</sup> Comfort, Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest Greek New Testament Manuscripts*, page 368.

<sup>2</sup> In Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible*, page 186.

<sup>3</sup> Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, page 233.

<sup>4</sup> Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*, pages 142-50.

<sup>5</sup> Hodges, Zane C. and Arthur L. Farstad. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Holmes et al, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, page 29.

<sup>7</sup> Some Christians and church-related people disdain Rome 'on principle' because of Roman Catholicism. They may need to be made aware of this: when *1 Clement* was written, **the seed and core of Roman Catholicism, the monarchical bishop, did not even exist at Rome yet.**

Titus 1:5 has καταστησης κατα πολιν πρεσβυτερους literally "appoint in each city |Officers"\* the latter translating πρεσβυτερους. 1 Timothy 5:17 shows that these governed congregations in New Testament times\*\*; the same Greek word appears there also when the passage is translated "Os presbiteros que governam bem sejam estimados" (ARC) = "The presbyters that govern well let-them-be esteemed." Hence, in Titus 1:5 we see that each congregation was to have multiple leaders. Acts 20:17 has πρεσβυτερους της εκκλησιας = "presbíteros da | congregacion"^^ = "presbyters-of-the congregation." Again, this is one congregation, multiple presbyters/leaders. This is how we see congregations governed during the New Testament decades.

The congregation at Alexandria in Egypt likely had no bishop before the second century.^† There was a thriving Christian community there in the first century.†\*

A possibility that the one-bishop system of church government began as an unestablished system in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece has been suggested by scholars.† The letters of Ignatius from c. 110 written to congregations Greece and eastward repeatedly urge submission to local singular bishops.†† However, the only letter written to a western church, that at Rome, mentions no singular bishop.‡ *1 Clement* does not show a singular leader giving direction to the church at Corinth; it was a congregation to congregation letter. The preferred church leadership is described at *1 Clement* 47:6 when it disdains "that the well-established and ancient church of the Corinthians, because of one or two persons, is rebelling against its presbyters."<sup>††</sup> Notice the plural "presbyters." From all these indications, is evident that at the time *1 Clement* was written, there was no monarchical bishop at Corinth or at Rome.

\* Marshall, *The Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament*, page 620 | TCNT.

\*\* *New Pilgrim Study Bible*, pages 1700-1.

^\* ARA| English W. Tyndale New Testament 1526.

^† In Goehring, Timbie, *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity*, page 4.

†\* *Life Application Study Bible*, page 2186.

† Jefford et al, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, page 62.

†† Jefford et al, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, page 62-3.

‡ Jefford et al, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, page 63.

†† Holmes et al, *The Apostolic Fathers*, page 83.

*Apostolic Fathers*<sup>1n</sup> with *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*.<sup>2n</sup> When I did this, I found *1 Clement* to be involved in only one textual variant involving the main "Alexandrian" text class manuscript and the second most important: Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. That variant is Romans 4:8 as quoted at *1 Clement* 50:6. Just a few decades prior, Paul had written the book of Romans and sent it to the congregation at Rome. At Romans 4:8, the Byzantine text class has Μακαριος ανηρ ω ου μη λογισηται κυριος αμαρτιαν and the two preeminent "Alexandrian" text class manuscripts have Μακαριος ανηρ ου ου μη λογισηται κυριος αμαρτιαν.<sup>3</sup> *1 Clement* 50:6 agrees with the latter verbatim: μακαριος ανηρ ου ου μη λογισηται κυριος αμαρτιαν.<sup>4</sup> The text is translated at Romans 4:8 "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin" (RSV 1952).<sup>5n</sup> When the congregation at Rome wrote what is now called *1 Clement* and quoted Romans 4:7-8, they were quoting an important personal letter from just a few decades past.

The manuscript evidence and early historical evidence favors the so-called "Alexandrian" text as the text of at least the majority of manuscripts c. 100, which is the decades after the close of the New Testament period. *However, the most important evidence is still left:* the Word of God itself gives us hints as to which text class is most likely closest to original. Luke and Acts were originally a two-volume work. Acts 1:1-2 says "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up" (RSV 1952, ESV). The "first book" is the Gospel of Luke, so Acts 1:1-2 shows that Luke originally had the ascension of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> The Western text class includes Codex Bezae and Old Latin manuscripts, and the Western text is unique in lacking "and was carried up to heaven" at Luke 24:51.<sup>7</sup> Even Codex Bezae has ανεληφθη<sup>8</sup> meaning "He was taken up"<sup>9</sup> like the manuscripts of the other two text classes at Acts 1:2. Hence, when Acts 1:2 notes that Luke had the Ascension, and the Western text of Luke does not have it but the other two text classes do at Luke 24:51, it means that Scripture shows that the Western text is wrong at Luke 24:51.

At what is now 1 Timothy 5:18 we have "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire" (ASV). The first quote of "the scripture" here is from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the second is from Luke 10:7.<sup>10</sup> Compare the Greek:

Luke 10:7 end: ἄξιος γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ  
1 Timothy 5:18 second quote: Ἀξιός ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ<sup>11</sup>

an exact match minus γάρ = "for."<sup>12</sup> In the former, the clause was linked by "for" to a previous statement of Jesus, but in the latter was meant to be independent, so this would be a fitting grammatical adjustment. Rules for citations were not as strict in the ancient world as they are in American society. Consider how 1 Timothy 5:18 quotes Luke 10:7, and recall that the relevant passage of 1 Timothy 5:18 is shared by the majority of manuscripts<sup>13</sup> and KJV's source text,<sup>14</sup> both of which are Byzantine. This text is the same in modern editions of the Greek New Testament which give most

<sup>1</sup> Holmes, Michael W. (ed.). The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations. Edited and translated by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, updated and revised by Michael W. Holmes. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Hodges, Zane C. and Arthur L. Farstad. The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 483.

<sup>4</sup> In Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, page 85.

<sup>5</sup> The variance in Greek texts here does not effect English translation. Also, I added the markings over Greek words that would otherwise have appeared to be duplicates.

<sup>6</sup> Noted by Gipp, The Answer Book, pages 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Comfort, Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the New Testament, page 103.

<sup>8</sup> Nestle, Aland, et al, Novum Testamentum Graece, page 320.

<sup>9</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 409.

<sup>10</sup> Noted in Paige Patterson's article in Criswell, Believer's Study Bible, page 1843.

<sup>11</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, pages 246, 733.

<sup>12</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 246.

<sup>13</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 631.

<sup>14</sup> Green, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 645.

weight to the so-called “Alexandrian” text class. Now, compare the Byzantine and “Alexandrian” text classes at the quoted part of Luke 10:7

Byzantine: ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶ<sup>1</sup>  
 “Alexandrian” and Western: ἄξιός γάρ ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ<sup>2</sup>

Immediately compare to 1 Timothy 5:18 above. These readings at Luke 10:7 are literally translated

Byzantine: “for worthy the workman of his hire is”<sup>3</sup>  
 “Alexandrian” and Western: “for worthy the workman of his hire”<sup>4</sup>

The Byzantine text adds to Luke 10:7 a clarifying word ἐστὶ = “is”<sup>5</sup> but that does not appear in the quotation at 1 Timothy 5:18. When we consider how Luke 24:51 + Acts 1:1-2 testified against the Western text, we focus on how the “Alexandrian” text of the quoted part of Luke 10:7 matches the quotation at 1 Timothy 5:18.

The only text class to be universally supported by Scripture is the so-called “Alexandrian” text. The designation is a misnomer, because this text was an ancient text that was *WIDESPREAD* in ancient times, and the basis of it was the New Testament secretary-authors’ pens as they wrote outside of Egypt. This ancient text is universally supported in Scripture and also by the archaeology of surviving ancient New Testament Greek manuscripts. Hence, although the so-called “Alexandrian” text does not always represent the original New Testament text, it should be most closely trusted to do so as decisions are made at places of manuscript variance.

### Eliminating Proposed Competition to Scripture – Part 1 of 3: Other Texts

Now, with the Scriptures being defined, there have been efforts to advance competing authorities for Scripture. Proposals have included additional literature, Bible translations instead of the original texts, conjecture, human philosophy and/or human beliefs about history and the universe, and sadly, the church itself, which ought to know better.

Recall 2 Timothy 3:16-7a “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for | doctrine |, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete” (ESV | KJV, NKJV | ASV). The Greek word translated “complete” is ἀρτιος and means “perfectly fit,”<sup>6</sup> “entirely suited; complete”<sup>7</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show regarding Scripture “It is God’s way of preparing us in every way” (NLT 1996). This was written to the New Testament church and describes their Old Testament and Greek New Testament.

The most famous competing literature to the Scriptures is the Book of Mormon. Unknown to many, the Mormons, also called “Latter-Day Saints,”<sup>8n</sup> also adopt their *The Pearl of Great Price* and *The Doctrine and the Covenants* among their Scriptures.<sup>9</sup> The Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 23:39-24 is included in the *Pearl of Great Price*. At *Joseph Smith – Matthew* 1:26 the text reads “For as the light of the morning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, and covereth the whole earth, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.” There are two parts of this not present in the KJV of Matthew 24:27 “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” – those parts are “of the morning” and “and covereth the whole earth.” The “of the morning” is meant to be a clarification of what is translated from

<sup>1</sup> Farstad, Hodges, et al, NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament, page 250.

<sup>2</sup> In Maius, Codex Vaticanus Novum Testamentum Graece Ex Antiquissimo Codice Vaticano, page 133; Scrivener, Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis, Being an Exact Copy, in Ordinary Type, page 204.

<sup>3</sup> G. Berry, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 186.

<sup>4</sup> G. Berry, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 186.

<sup>5</sup> Farstad, Hodges, et al, NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament, page 250.

<sup>6</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>7</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>8</sup> We will use this designation because the ones I have spoken with seem to prefer it.

<sup>9</sup> Ballard, Our Search for Happiness, page 47.

αστραπη rendered in the KJV "lightning." The addition of "of the morning" to clarify indicates that what was there in the Greek New Testament is not held as sufficient. Similar happens at *Joseph Smith – Matthew 1:37b* "they shall gather together the remainder of his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." The Greek text as rendered in the KJV at Matthew 24:31 has "they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." The addition of "the remainder of" is a clarification on what is in the Greek text. In both cases, adoption of this portion of the "Joseph Smith Translation" within the *Pearl of Great Price* as Scripture would require that the Greek New Testament itself did not correctly record all revelation needed for proper Christianity. This is contrary to 2 Timothy 3:17a which says that the New Testament church's Scriptures made Christians ἀρτιος "perfectly fit"<sup>1</sup> "entirely suited; complete."<sup>2</sup> Because of this, we must reject these additional writings.

Other attempts to misplace the authority of the New Testament church's Scriptures include passing that authority to translations of them. Up to the 1800's, some believed that the German Luther Bible was a "second inspiration."<sup>3</sup> More seriously, the Latin Vulgate was for centuries given similar authority by a large segment of the church, and also the ancient Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament has been given authority above the Semitic Old Testament in another portion of the church. Still further, in English some have given the 1769 edition of the King James Version such authority and this continues to the decades around 2000. We will examine each of the latter in turn.

For the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek, it is common tradition in the Orthodox churches to place that as more authoritative than the Old Testament in the Semitic languages.<sup>4</sup> The Septuagint is considered to be the official Old Testament among the Orthodox.<sup>5</sup> To some Greek-speaking Jewish circles, the Septuagint also took precedence over the Semitic Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> What is notable is that even among Greek-speaking Jews, only some of them gave precedence to the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament; others did not. That the church was not intended to separate from Judaism is evident from Paul's warnings against Christians engaging in anti-Judaic bigotry in Romans 11:17-27 on the basis that Gentile salvation branches from the Jewish roots. Paul also stated at Romans 10:12a "There is then no distinction between Jew and Greek, for they all belong to the same Lord" (NBV). Paul continued to identify himself as a Pharisee per Acts 23:6 and Philippians 3:5. Further, at James 2:2, the meeting place of the Christians of James 2:2 is called a "synagogue" in the Greek<sup>7</sup> -- συναγωγην. Hence, if some of even the Greek-reading/hearing Jews did not put the Septuagint above the Semitic Old Testament, it follows that this certainly was not to be the practice of the church as a whole.

Paul was an apostle. Paul was also a secretary-author of a major portion of the New Testament. Paul used both the Hebrew Old Testament text and the Greek Septuagint translation as a source for his quotes of the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup> Paul himself did not place the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament as his sole authority for Old Testament Scripture; often, he took the trouble to translate Hebrew into Greek for the benefit of his Greek-speaking audiences rather than quote what they were familiar with. It is important also to remember that Paul's epistles are Scripture according to 2 Peter 3:15-6, and therefore God is their ultimate Author. Hence, if God Himself did not see fit to attribute sole authority to the Septuagint for the Old Testament, no one should.

<sup>1</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas K. Kutilek in Beacham, Bauder, One Bible Only?, page 41-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ware, The Orthodox Church, page 200.

<sup>5</sup> Stamatias, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 105.

<sup>6</sup> Müller, The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint, page 115.

<sup>7</sup> Open Bible, page 1226.

<sup>8</sup> Open Bible, page 1211.

Catholicism for centuries held the Latin Vulgate translation as the highest authority for Scripture. At the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent on April 8, 1546, Catholic authorities decreed of the Vulgate "no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever."<sup>1</sup> This is why the Douay-Rheims Version sometimes differs substantially from Bible translations direct from the original languages; it was a Catholic translation of the Latin Vulgate finished in 1610, and made changes to until 1752. This rule changed; in 1943 the bishop of Rome, who dictates official Catholic precepts, decreed in the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* that the original languages of Scripture take precedence.<sup>2</sup> This is why Catholic scholars now base their work on texts in the original languages.

A similar teaching extant as of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the English King James Version must have authority equal to or greater than the New Testament church's Scriptures.<sup>3n</sup> This is similar to a common view in the 1800's which held the German Luther Bible as a "second inspiration"<sup>4</sup> in German.<sup>5n</sup> In 1830 the Barren River Association distinguished Scripture "as translated by the authority of King James" to be "the only true rule of faith and practice."<sup>6</sup> Samuel Gipp conjectured about God "Just as He has shown in His choosing only **one** language for the Old Testament and only **one** language for the New Testament, He continued that practice by combining those two testaments in only **one** language."<sup>7</sup> Jeff McArdle writes "there never will be a King James Bible in the Spanish language. The King James Bible is superior to any book or Bible ever written and it will remain that way until Christ returns."<sup>8</sup> Peter Ruckman recognized discrepancies between the KJV and Greek New Testament, and wrote that the "AV 1611 text is to be preferred over any Greek text,"<sup>9</sup> "Where the Greek says one thing and the AV says another, throw out the Greek,"<sup>10</sup> that divergence is "advanced revelation" by the KJV,<sup>11</sup> and "a little English will clear up the obscurities in any Greek text."<sup>12</sup>

Recall that 2 Timothy 3:16-7a was written to the New Testament churches and says "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for |doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). The Greek word translated "complete" is *αρτιος* and means "perfectly fit"<sup>13</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>14</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). The New Testament church's Scriptures, which included the Palestinian Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, were entirely sufficient for the Christian and made the Christian "perfectly fit" and "entirely suited; complete." Any notion that the

<sup>1</sup> In Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, page 2:82.

<sup>2</sup> *Preface to the New American Bible, Old Testament*. New American Bible, copyright 1969, 1970, 1986, 1991 by Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> The KJV is a good translation overall. Throughout this study, it is used as a translation of the Scriptures alongside numerous other translations in English and in other languages. Nonetheless, some people esteem it as much more, and the results are often harmful. Therefore, I will be discussing why these lavish esteems of the KJV are well beyond its due merits.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas K. Kutilek in Beacham, Bauder, *One Bible Only?*, page 41-2.

<sup>5</sup> The Luther Bible has disagreements with the King James Version. The 1545 Luther Bible has "mit deinen werken" = "with your works" at James 2:18 where the 1611 KJV has "without thy workes." It would be impossible, without extra-biblical speculation, to decide which translation would be inerrant, if either. The New Testament-era Bible text would be the verifiable authority between the two. This is fitting, as the New Testament-era church's Scriptures are final authority on any subject they address.

<sup>6</sup> Stauffer, *One Book Stands Alone*, page 275; emphases his.

<sup>7</sup> Gipp, *The Answer Book*, page 33.

<sup>8</sup> McArdle, *The Bible Believer's Guide to Elephant Hunting*, page 23; emphasis his.

<sup>9</sup> Ruckman, *The Christian's Guide to Manuscript Evidence*, page 137.

<sup>10</sup> Ruckman, *The Christian's Guide to Manuscript Evidence*, page 151.

<sup>11</sup> Ruckman, *The Christian's Guide to Manuscript Evidence*, page 139.

<sup>12</sup> Ruckman, *The Christian's Guide to Manuscript Evidence*, page 161.

<sup>13</sup> Friberg et al, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 76.

<sup>14</sup> In Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 54.

Latin Vulgate or English King James Version should take precedence over those Scriptures<sup>1n</sup> would require that those Scriptures were not enough for the Christian, which is biblically impossible.

Statements that are at best of questionable judgment are often advanced in this cause. D. A. Waite claims that at 1 John 4:3 "Leaving out 'Christ is come in the flesh' is a denial of His incarnation."<sup>2</sup> Gail Riplinger writes regarding 1 John 4:3 "By omitting 'Christ' and 'is come in the flesh,' new versions are not confessing that 'Jesus Christ is come in the flesh'; as John says, 'this is that spirit of antichrist.'"<sup>3</sup> Neither considers back just one verse to 1 John 4:2 which states very clearly "every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (ASV). It is important to remember that the Bible came to us unversified; competent Bible study requires us to be able to examine whole passages of Scripture, and in the KJV, what is now 1 John 4:2-3 is only one sentence.

Similar inaccuracy is in dealing with foreign translations. Jeff McArdle claims regarding the Spanish Reina-Valera Revisión of 1960 at 2 Thessalonians 2:2 "the RVR 1960 removes the word 'Christ' and replaces it with 'Lord.'"<sup>4</sup> The KJV has "day of Christ" where the RVR 1909 and 1960 have "día del Señor" = "day of-the Lord." This is due to variance in Greek manuscripts; let us examine which reading the 1602 Valera followed: "dia del Señor" which is spelled presently "día del Señor"<sup>5n</sup> = "day of-the Lord." The RVR 1960 changes nothing in this regard; the RVR 1960 has the exact same text as the RVR 1909 which followed the RVR 1862 which followed the 1602 Valera Bible.

Similar statements include "the new versions are *more* difficult to read than the KJV" by Gail Riplinger based on a computer software tool.<sup>6</sup> Computers are not human readers. Let us compare John 3:16 in the KJV to a modern translation that existed in 1993, the year of her first book:

KJV "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

ICB-NCV<sup>7n</sup> "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life."

Honestly, if the child is dear to you personally, which translation would you want quoted to this child on this important verse when s/he is seriously listening to how to get to Heaven? To a nine year old child, there is a difference between "whosoever" and "whoever"; "everlasting" and "eternal"; "so loved the world" and "loved the world so much"; "perish" and "be lost." The KJV does not compare in readability to any translation into English as spoken in the 1900's and later.<sup>8n</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some twist 'weaker faith' passages to manipulate people to put the King James Version as the highest Bible authority. First, they seek to weaken the faith of believers; they seek to make the case that unless someone can see and hold a tangible perfect edition of the Scriptures, s/he can have no confidence in Scripture. That is the level of faith that prompted the idolatry of Exodus 32: they needed something tangible. Scripture repeatedly encourages strong faith, such as at Luke 7:9. Any effort to stunt or damage a valued quality of Christ's servants is wrong.

<sup>2</sup> Waite, Defending the King James Bible, page 160.

<sup>3</sup> Riplinger, New Age Bible Versions, page 351.

<sup>4</sup> McArdle, The Bible Believer's Guide to Elephant Hunting, page 104.

<sup>5</sup> English changes too; 1 John 1:8 John Wycliffe-John Purvey Bible, Middle English 1395: "If we seien, that we han no synne, we disseyuen vs silf, and truethe is not in vs."\* = "If we say, that we have no sin, we deceive us self, and truth is not in us." Middle English had -n verb endings for plural subjects.

\*Reprint © 2006 The Bible Reader's Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Riplinger, New Age Bible Versions, page 3.

<sup>7</sup> Scriptures quoted from the International Children's Bible, New Century Version, © 1986 by Sweet Publishing, Fort Worth, Texas 76137. Used by permission. "ICB" in this study refers to the ICB of 1999 -- see bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding children's Christian education, this should be heeded about use of the King James Version, and use of high school reading level translations -- regardless of what is put on the book cover: if we do not make Scripture's teachings understandable to children, the carnal world stands very ready to make understandable to them its opposing teachings.

Blind fanaticism is common to this persuasion. We note William Grady, who wrote in a tirade about "papal armies" this about the 1620 Pilgrims: "Upon the Mayflower's landing in Cape Cod, an aquatic barrier of over 3,000 miles gave the church unprecedented protection and liberty."<sup>1</sup> The Pilgrims did not set sail to flee the Vatican; they left religious persecution<sup>2n</sup> by King James's England.

Conspiracy accusations are common among this persuasion. We note the conspiracy-laden words of KJV advocate Samuel Gipp who claims that the rule of manuscript evidence when the oldest manuscripts and majority of manuscripts differ is "Do what you want as long as you **do not** agree with the Authorized Version."<sup>3</sup> If this was true, all of the modern translations into English would have a mention of the "Pharisees" at Matthew 27:41, but this is not the case. More seriously, he charges of the translators of the New American Standard Bible at James 5:16

"The Greek word translated 'faults' in the King James Bible (paraptomata) is found in manuscripts E, F, G, H, S, V, Y, and Omega plus the rest of the Receptus family and the greater number of all remaining witnesses. Nestle's text inserts 'sins' (tax amartias) with **no** manuscript authority. The misguided men of the Lockman Foundation accept it with no evidence, no resistance and no questions. Perhaps there are more Jesuits lurking in the shadows than we think! Anyone accepting an alternate reading with no evidence **cannot** be credited with acting ethically or scholarly."<sup>4</sup>

The clauses "**no** manuscript authority" and "no evidence" are completely untrue. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* did report the manuscript evidence: the Greek word transliterated *amartias* is found at James 5:16 in manuscripts Aleph, B, and A.<sup>5</sup> Here, the common Jesuit conspiracy theory is referred to,<sup>6n</sup> and the ethics and competence of translators who consider multiple sources of information<sup>7n</sup> are both reviled untruthfully.

Gail Riplinger is more aggressive in such tactics. One method she uses is misquotation. Of John Burgon, she 'quotes' "'I have convinced myself by laborious collation that they are the most corrupt of all. They are the depositories of the largest amount of fabricated and intentional perversions of truth which are discoverable in any copies of the word of God. They exhibit a fabricated text...[and are] shamefully mutilated.'"<sup>8</sup> The substantiating endnote: "The Revision Revised, pp. 16, 520, 318."<sup>9</sup> The problem is that the ellipses imply that these words are quoted in the order of original writing, but "shamefully mutilated" comes *BEFORE* the rest of the quoted words in J. Burgon's *Revision Revised* -- not after. This is not a valid quote because there are chapters upon chapters between the first two extracts and they are not part of the same immediate train of thought, and further the quoted words are out of order. In another place, she has "Carson, a KJV detractor who felt 10% of its readings were late"<sup>10</sup> with substantiating endnote "*The King James Version Debate*, p. 111."<sup>11</sup> This is inaccurate; D. A. Carson was referring to E. F. Hills contends that only about 10% of the Byzantine readings are really late" on page 111 of his book *The King James Version Debate*.<sup>12</sup> Many in the 'supremacy of the King James Version' movement consider G. A.

<sup>1</sup> Grady, *Final Authority*, page 320.

<sup>2</sup> I learned about persecution for not joining the Church of England in 2nd grade fall 1984.

<sup>3</sup> Gipp, *Gipp's Understandable History of the Bible*, page 338; emphases his.

<sup>4</sup> Gipp, *Gipp's Understandable History of the Bible*, page 344; emphases his.

<sup>5</sup> Hodges, Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, page 686.

<sup>6</sup> This is the fear that the Jesuit order of Catholic priests is trying to influence non-Catholics to corrupt Bible translations to be favorable to Roman Catholicism.

<sup>7</sup> *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* was first printed in 1982, so early editions of the NASB would not have used it, but there were sources besides the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* for manuscript information.

<sup>8</sup> Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, page 546 – ellipsis and brackets hers.

<sup>9</sup> Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, page 686.

<sup>10</sup> Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, page 484.

<sup>11</sup> Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, page 682.

<sup>12</sup> D. Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, page 111.

Riplinger's tabloid-style journalism an embarrassment, but many others consider her a hero to be praised lavishly<sup>1n</sup> and to be invited to write articles to contribute to books edited by other authors.

David Cloud and Gail Riplinger submitted articles in Mickey Carter's *The Elephant in the Living Room*. In this book, Gail Riplinger claims that the Spanish upper case name "Lucero" at Isaiah 14:12 is the same as lower case "lucero" at 2 Peter 1:19.<sup>2</sup> Cases matter as much in Spanish as they do in English.<sup>3n</sup> My childhood cat was named Princess, but when I talk about a specific human princess, I am not calling her my childhood cat. Capitalization makes as much difference in Spanish as in modern English. David Cloud writes "**I am convinced that the KJV and the distinctive edition of the TR underlying it is the unreserved Word of God, and one way or the other every foreign language translation needs to be brought to this Touchstone.**"<sup>4</sup> As we have observed in *Part 1/Deciding the Text of Scripture - Part III of III*, the modern "Textus Receptus" = "TR" underlying the KJV did not exist before 1881, when it was edited according to the 1611 KJV as a matter of historical inquiry. D. Cloud's position holds that the authority for determining the original Greek text must be the KJV, and that that would place the KJV as ultimate biblical authority.

The Mormon/"Latter Day Saint" *Articles of Faith* in *The Pearl of Great Price* has "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly"; this centralizes the translation as the Bible.<sup>5n</sup> Timothy Morton wrote regarding the family of Greek texts underneath the King James Version "A Bible believer does not believe the *Received Text* (which was written in what is now a dead language) to be his final authority. He believes the Bible God has given him in his OWN language."<sup>6</sup> In essence, the "Bible believer" is to place the English translation above the Greek text. We recall Jeff McArdle's statement "there never will be a King James Bible in the Spanish language. The King James Bible is superior to any book or Bible ever written and it will remain that way until Christ returns."<sup>7</sup> We take this also to mean that the King James Version is held to be superior to even the Greek New Testament, and this is suggested when he says in the same paragraph and on the same page "Spain was rejected *by God* from producing the one Book that He wanted to use in the last days as final authority."<sup>8</sup> We recall David Cloud who believes that a foreign translation

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<sup>1</sup> In 1996 Gail Riplinger was given an Honorary Doctorate at Hyles-Anderson Bible College,\* an unaccredited college in Indiana. For the 2006-7 year, mathematics course "MA 101" was officially designated "A course designed for education majors with a weakness in mathematics. It includes simple arithmetic, fractions, decimals, percent, proportions, word problems, properties of real numbers, exponents, and introduction to algebra. Applications are stressed."<sup>†</sup> The next "Algebra" course is MA 210.<sup>†</sup> Among accredited colleges in Indiana, courses that are predominantly reviews of sub-algebra arithmetic are 0-hundred level, and above-basic algebra is 100-level. The rationale is that math is a standard requirement in schools, Algebra 1 is the standard math course in high school, and so college credit earners should be able to at least exceed such a standard either immediately or after preparatory courses. Such low academic standards of the institution are unbecoming accreditation as a college.

\*In Carter, *The Elephant in the Living Room*, page 109.

<sup>†</sup> Hyles-Anderson College 2006-7, page 102;

<<http://www.hylesanderson.com/pdfs/haccatalog2006-2007.pdf>> November 13, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> In Carter, *The Elephant in the Living Room*, pages 67-8.

<sup>3</sup> As for G. Riplinger's knowledge of Spanish shown in that book, it is at best highly unlikely that she wrote the corresponding article in the Spanish edition *El Elefante en la Sala*. No translator of this book is specified, and no Spanish-reading person would be aware from the book itself that it is an effort of English-speaking people.

<sup>4</sup> In Carter, *The Elephant in the Living Room*, page 91; emphasis his.

<sup>5</sup> Latter-Day Saint = LDS author Stephen E. Robinson says "the King James Bible is the LDS Bible."\* This affects English ONLY; some foreign Bibles are approved.<sup>†</sup>

\* Blomberg, Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, page 59.

<sup>†</sup> Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, page 149.

<sup>6</sup> Morton, *Which Bible Should You Trust?*, page 45.

<sup>7</sup> McArdle, *The Bible Believer's Guide to Elephant Hunting*, page 23.

<sup>8</sup> McArdle, *The Bible Believer's Guide to Elephant Hunting*, page 23; emphasis his.



must be altered according to the Greek text edited according to the King James Version. We recall that Peter Ruckman wrote "a little English will clear up the obscurities in any Greek text."<sup>1</sup>

At 1 Corinthians 14:33a the 1611 edition of the KJV has "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" with margin note "†Gr. tumult, or vnquietness." The KJV translators themselves indicate divergence between the Greek they were translating versus wording they chose.

Are English-reading Christians the first to have Scripture? What was Jesus referring to when He spoke John 10:35b "a Escritura não pode falhar" (ARA) = "the Scripture no/not <=> it-can fail" translated more directly "as Escrituras Sagradas sempre dizem a verdade" (NTLH) = "the Scriptures Sacred always they-say the truth"? What was Paul referring to when he wrote 2 Timothy 3:16a? Clearly, Scripture existed before English began to exist centuries later in the late first millennium.

Paul at 2 Timothy 3:16-7a wrote in Greek "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for |doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV); ἀρτιος "complete" means "perfectly fit"<sup>2</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>3</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17 can be translated regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). No further revelation was needed. We needed no "Joseph Smith Translation" to be adopted into a new Scripture called *The Pearl of Great Price*, and nor the KJV to help us decide what Greek New Testament text to translate, nor the KJV to "clear up the obscurities in" the Greek text given to the New Testament church. The New Testament church's Scriptures were all-sufficient then and always. To assert otherwise is to go against the Scriptures of the New Testament church led by the Lord Jesus Christ's Personally-commissioned apostles.

About the KJV in relation to foreign language translations, some boast the KJV must *a priori* be more reliable than any foreign language translation. As seen in essays on the Greek New Testament text, the KJV differs in underlying Greek text from older foreign language translations. How do we know, without extrabiblical speculation, that God would give any one language-culture a Bible translation to be above all other language-cultures' Bible translations, and if He would, which language? 1 Corinthians 4:6 records a New Testament church precept το μη υπερα γεγραπται literally

1. "el no sobre lo que está escrito"<sup>4</sup> = "the not over it that it-is written."
2. "the not beyond what has been written."<sup>5</sup>

This was a New Testament church maxim with a name. 2 Timothy 3:16-7a written to the New Testament church in Greek is translated "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for |doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). The Greek word translated "complete" is ἀρτιος and means "perfectly fit"<sup>6</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>7</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). That New Testament church maxim of 1 Corinthians 4:6 fits in the context of 2 Timothy 3:16-7a and is sufficient for all time. We are not to speculate beyond the Scriptures in areas of asserted doctrine or mandated practice/non-practice. The assertion that one post-New Testament language-culture's Bible translation is divinely appointed to have all other language-culture's Bible translations subject to it is an asserted doctrine outside of Scripture, and further to assert that people should actually place one language-culture's Bible translations in subjection to another *a priori* is a mandated practice in violation of that New Testament church maxim. If a doctrine or practice/non-practice cannot be shown from the New Testament church's Scriptures alone, it cannot be asserted.

<sup>1</sup> Ruckman, *The Christian's Guide to Manuscript Evidence*, page 161.

<sup>2</sup> Friberg et al, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 76.

<sup>3</sup> In Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 54.

<sup>4</sup> Lacueva, *Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español*, page 665.

<sup>5</sup> McReynolds, *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*, page 603.

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

<sup>6</sup> Friberg et al, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 76.

<sup>7</sup> In Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 54.

The New Testament church's Scriptures were the Scriptures of church under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ's apostles whom He commissioned Personally. This should keep anyone from placing any later translation of those Scriptures on a plane equal to or higher than those Scriptures.

Eliminating Proposed Competition to Scripture – Part 2 of 3: Other Sources

It is a common fad in decades around 2000 to discuss "oral traditions" to seek 'more accurate' renditions of Jesus' sayings by conjecturing back through "oral traditions."<sup>1n</sup> It is true that Jesus' sayings were passed on orally, but that certainly does not mean Scripture is not 'accurate enough.'

After Jesus Christ instituted His church, His sayings were passed on, but also written down, and accounts about Him and the origins of His church were written. To open up Luke-Acts, Luke 1:1 reports "many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us" (RSV 1952) to open up the gospel of Luke and the church history of Acts.

Early church records teem of traces of such things. The New Testament gospels include Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The origins of Matthew are mysterious; Papias from the 130's/140's C.E. reported that "So Matthew composed the oracles in the Hebrew language and each person translated them as best he could"<sup>2</sup> – a sayings document.<sup>3n</sup> The gospel of Matthew we have in the New Testament is in Greek, and does not seem to be a translation of an Aramaic document either.<sup>4</sup>

The undivided testimony of the early church is that Matthew wrote first.<sup>5</sup> The Greek texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often too similar to be likely coincidental; this is called the Synoptic Problem. One theory has Mark as a source for the other two. There are reasons for this. For instance, in most variances of wording, Matthew and Mark go together or Luke and Mark go together.<sup>6</sup> Also, for events Mark records, Matthew and Luke often have the same order, never leave Mark's sequence together,<sup>7</sup> and for non-Mark material their orders vary.<sup>8</sup> The gospels never claim to be chronological; in ancient times, rearranging Jesus' sayings into sermons was acceptable biography.<sup>9</sup> The evidence is not total: sometimes Matthew and Luke share closer wording to each other than to Mark.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The depths some Bible deniers will go into speculation can rarely be underestimated. For instance, manuscript P52 of John has long been dated early 100's. To push the date of John up to 120 C.E., it is conjectured that there were multiple layered forms of it\* -- even though only one form is extant or reported from antiquity.

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

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

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

† Harris, Understanding the Bible, page 397.

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

<sup>2</sup> In Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, page 569.

<sup>3</sup> This was not an Aramaic gospel among Nazorean Jewish-Christians. That had narratives over Jesus' whole earthly life with additions in comparison to the gospel of Matthew.\*

\*Klijn, Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition, page 37.

<sup>4</sup> Open Bible, page 937.

<sup>5</sup> In Criswell, Believer's Study Bible, page 1326.

<sup>6</sup> Streeter, The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, page 162.

<sup>7</sup> Gundry, A Survey of the New Testament, page 97.

<sup>8</sup> Feine, Behm, Introduction to the New Testament, page 52.

<sup>9</sup> Schenck, Jesus Is Lord: An Introduction to the New Testament, page 221.

<sup>10</sup> Streeter, The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, page 168; Koester, Ancient Christian Gospels, page 279.

Most New Testament scholars believe that the gospels of Matthew and Luke were composed using the gospel of Mark and a source they call "Q" from German "quelle"; this Q-source is not manuscript Q Codex Guelferbytanus, which is a real manuscript of the New Testament from c. 400 C.E.. This Q-source is thought to be a first-century document composed of material common to Matthew and Luke but not in Mark; it is considered lost, and attempted reconstructions are many and conjectural. This conjectured lost source is unneeded.

Luke 1:1 reports "many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us" (RSV 1952) to open the gospel of Luke and the church history of Acts. Per Luke 1:1, records of Christian beginnings were plentiful in the New Testament era. The conjectured Q-source is mostly sayings but has a little narrative.<sup>1</sup> Papias's 130's/140's C.E. statement about an Aramaic document that Matthew wrote described the document as "oracles," meaning 'utterances' or 'sayings.' We can replace the conjectured Q-source with the historically-attested document.

It has been suggested that Luke and the gospel of Matthew had as sources an earlier edition of Matthew and a list of sayings, both of which were written in Aramaic and translated into Greek.<sup>2</sup> A reason for this is that Luke and the author of the present gospel of Matthew each handled the list of sayings differently.<sup>3</sup> It has also been suggested that Mark used an older form of Matthew.<sup>4</sup> Matthew and Mark are most similar in order and wording overall.<sup>5</sup> The bulk of material unique to Matthew is sayings but there is some narrative,<sup>6</sup> as is the case for the conjectured Q-source. The mostly-narrative biographical portions of proposed "Q material" are in the same orders in both Matthew and Luke.<sup>7</sup> A substantial amount of "Q material" in Luke shows translation Greek.<sup>8</sup> The conjectured Q-source has been shown from linguistic analysis to have been originally in Aramaic.<sup>9</sup> The bulk of material in the conjectured Q-source and the bulk of material unique to the gospel of Matthew are mostly sayings with some narrative. It is best not to propose much of a plurality of ancient writings, as Jewish culture had an aversion to literary composition.<sup>10</sup> I suggest that the conjectured Q-source and the material unique to Matthew were all encompassed in one document written in Aramaic.

Interestingly, in Luke 10-19, speeches of Jesus were in a different order between Matthew and Luke, but the sayings within the speeches were mostly in the same order.<sup>11</sup> There is language and linguistic style that is found repeatedly in Matthew but only found in Luke when Luke is paralleling Matthew.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that Luke was following Matthew or a document similar to it.<sup>13</sup>

There are numerous aspects of the Marcan-priority + Q hypothesis as commonly accepted among New Testament scholars that are problematic. Mark wrote in a very simplified form of Greek so that anyone with minimal Greek functionality could have understood it.<sup>14</sup> Certainly Mark was written very early, as the Greek style in it is cruder than in Matthew or Luke.<sup>15</sup> There are hints that he was modifying material from Matthew or an earlier version of it. For instance, everyone would agree that Jesus Christ was Jewish and that His earthly ministry was mainly directed towards Jews living in

<sup>1</sup> First seen by the study's author in Mack, The Lost Gospel: Q and Christian Origins; other interesting reconstructions studied by the study's author: R. Miller, Complete Gospels and Kloppenborg, Q Parallels.

<sup>2</sup> In Wansbrough, The New Jerusalem Bible, pages 1601-2.

<sup>3</sup> In Wansbrough, The New Jerusalem Bible, page 1601.

<sup>4</sup> Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, page 138.

<sup>5</sup> Schenck, Jesus Is Lord: An Introduction to the New Testament, page 222.

<sup>6</sup> Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, pages 160, 164-6.

<sup>7</sup> Based on reconstructions in R. Miller, Complete Gospels and Kloppenborg, Q Parallels.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, Studies in the Life and Ministry of the Historical Jesus, page 81.

<sup>9</sup> Duling, Perrin, The New Testament, page 14.

<sup>10</sup> Goodspeed, An Introduction to the New Testament, page 153.

<sup>11</sup> In McNicol et al, Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's Use of Matthew, page 21.

<sup>12</sup> In McNicol et al, Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's Use of Matthew, pages 22-4.

<sup>13</sup> In McNicol et al, Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's Use of Matthew, pages 22-4.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert's essay in New Interpreter's Study Bible, page 1802.

<sup>15</sup> C. Clifton Black's essay in Meeks, The HarperCollins Study Bible, page 1916.

Jewish territory. As Mark relates material found in Matthew, he consistently omits material relevant to Jews that is present in the gospel of Matthew.<sup>1</sup> It is more likely that the Jewish material was there and omitted, rather than posit that the Jewish material was added. The linguistic substratum of Matthew is deeply Semitic, but this substratum is reduced in Mark.<sup>2</sup> Further, there are cases where a passage in Mark relates material that is out of place, but that same material was in Matthew fitting integrally within a context.<sup>3</sup> While it is apparent that the gospel of Matthew used Mark when it was composed, it is apparent that Mark was drawing from a Matthew-like document.

I suggest Matthew wrote a primitive writing in Aramaic that was a narrative of Jesus Christ's life and teaching ministry with an addendum of mostly sayings. Recall that this would have been one of the first efforts to put the life and ministry of Jesus Christ into writing. There is good reason to expect such a document to be primitive compared to the New Testament gospels. I suggest Matthew wrote a narrative account of Jesus Christ's life and ministry in Aramaic, then appended some additional sayings of Jesus Christ. When this document was finished, it was translated into Greek.

One translation<sup>4n</sup> was used by Mark as the primary source for his gospel of Mark. Luke then used the gospel of Mark as the narrative frame for Luke-Acts, and he inserted extracts from the same translation to make a more thorough account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. To be sure, Luke 1:1 reports "many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us" (RSV 1952) and we can expect that Luke used the good fruits of such labors. Still, Luke made most use of Mark and a Greek translation of Matthew's Aramaic document.

Finally, someone else took the same translation and inserted extracts into, and sometimes over, Mark's gospel and edited the compilation to make an 'improved' gospel of Matthew that would compare with the other New Testament gospels.<sup>5n</sup> Notice that for the most part, extracts of the translation were inserted into Mark's narrative, but sometimes extracts of the translation were inserted over Mark's gospel. The narrative framework and main body of wording would have been the gospel of Mark, but the translation of Matthew's Aramaic document would have been richly deposited therein. The early church continued to attribute it to Matthew. It is possible they did this because they felt that the work was based so much on Matthew's work that he should rightfully be attributed authorship. They might have done this to enhance its authenticity, or for both reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierson Parker's essay in Farmer, New Synoptic Studies, page 80.

<sup>2</sup> B. C. Butler's essay in Bellinzoni, The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal, page 115.

<sup>3</sup> Pierson Parker's essay in Farmer, New Synoptic Studies, page 98.

<sup>4</sup> Existence of more than one translation of Matthew's Aramaic document is possible. An anonymous early homily presently called *2 Clement* from Egypt quotes Luke closely in Greek, but when it cites Matthew material, the Greek differs much more.\* It could be that *2 Clement* quotes another translation of Matthew's Aramaic writing used among the southern church. On the other hand, the anonymous traditionally-called *Epistle of Barnabas* also from Egypt seems to have quoted the gospel of Matthew as we have it.

\*Noted from parallels from: Koester, Ancient Christian Gospels, pages 351-8.

<sup>5</sup> There was an Aramaic gospel used among Hebrew Christians called the *Gospel of the Nazoreans*. This *Gospel of the Nazoreans* does not survive in manuscript form; it is known to us only from quotations and reports from early church writers. According to early church writers, it was similar to Matthew but had some differences. The association between the apostle Matthew, the existence of an Aramaic document that he wrote, the gospel of Matthew, and this *Gospel of the Nazoreans* certainly raises questions about their relationship.

The *Gospel of the Nazoreans* may have then been made using the original Aramaic document of Matthew as well as the gospel of Matthew. The *Gospel of the Nazoreans* certainly had expansions on the gospel of Matthew which likely did not originate with Matthew. Still, due to how similar early church writers reported it to be to the gospel of Matthew, it may have been made mainly by translating the gospel of Matthew into Aramaic. It is possible that in some places, rather than translating the gospel of Matthew into Aramaic as normal, the compiler used Matthew's original Aramaic writing instead.

The gospel of Matthew never claims Matthew as author. All four Scripture gospels were written anonymously. This was possibly to avoid focus on them as secretary-author, and keep the readers'/hearers' focus instead on the subject: Jesus Christ. Authenticity does not depend upon Matthew being author of the gospel of Matthew.

The model described above explains how the gospel of Matthew became associated so much with an Aramaic writing Matthew composed. It explains why the material of Mark appears in substantially the same order in both Matthew and Luke, while most material common to just Matthew and Luke varies widely in order. It explains why the small portions of primarily-narrative biographical material common to just Matthew and Luke have the same order. It explains why in wording Matthew and Luke both match Mark, or normally either Matthew or Luke matches Mark – and why there are instances that Matthew and Luke have matching wording against Mark, and why Mark and Luke sometimes show hints of drawing from Matthew. It explains signs of Aramaic origins of Matthew, and it stays within the parameters of documents for which there is real evidence.

We determined that while the gospel of Matthew is intimately connected to something Matthew wrote, the gospel of Matthew was not written by Matthew. Is the gospel of Matthew Scripture? Yes it is. Polycarp was a student of the apostle John. Polycarp quotes both parts of Ephesians 4:26 as "Scripture" at *Polycarp to Philipppians* 12:1. At 2:3, Polycarp has "Judge not, that you be not judged"<sup>1</sup> which is an exact match of Matthew 7:1 (RSV 1952). The Greek is exactly the same also: Μη κρινετε ινα μη κριθητε which is different from the parallel in Luke. The apostle John's student Polycarp recognized the gospel of Matthew as we have it as Scripture, continuing what was handed down to him from proper authority in the New Testament church.

The existence of slightly varying accounts of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry has caused some people to believe that they need to get 'behind' the New Testament gospels to get to the 'real Jesus' to learn His 'real' teachings.<sup>2n</sup> This is not biblically warranted. 2 Timothy 3:16a says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV). The Greek word translated "Scriptures" is γραφη,<sup>3</sup> means "what has been written,"<sup>4</sup> and refers to the text of written documents.<sup>5</sup> Whatever was said during Christ's earthly ministry, whatever God's written Word has is a 100% reliable and authoritative representation of what was intended to be communicated. There may be some merit to 'seeking behind the texts' for academic historical curiosity, but "what has been written" is most authoritative for Christian teaching.

<sup>1</sup> Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, page 132.

<sup>2</sup> It needs to be pointed out that a lot of these people are enemies of Christianity. They might claim church affiliation -- but the aims of their materials are to get people to think less highly of Him than Scripture teaches.

There are many authors who fully honor Jesus Christ but write things that would make people doubt Scripture. I do not agree that there is any good basis to deny the accuracy of any part of Scripture, and consider doing so to be very unsafe. Still, a person can be a skeptic of Scripture without denigrating Jesus Christ.

Other authors go beyond trying to get people to deny Scripture: they try to convince people to think less highly of Jesus Christ than what is right. To gain undeserved credibility for their materials, some of these allege church affiliation. For instance, John Shelby Spong, while presuming a role as an Anglican clergyman, described "the Christ story" as "the mythological tale that begins with a virgin birth and ends with a cosmic victory over death."\* He also wrote "a supernatural redeemer who enters our fallen world to restore creation is a theistic myth."\*\*

Here is a good rule to always remember: whatever the author claims, if what you are reading tries to convince you to think less highly of Jesus Christ than Scripture teaches, the author is not providing a 'Christian service.'

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, pages *Concordance* 1176, *Greek Dictionary* 20; Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, page *Analytical* 844

<sup>4</sup> Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, page 544.

<sup>5</sup> Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, page *Greek Dictionary* 20; Vine et al, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 552 NT.

### Eliminating Proposed Competition to Scripture – Part 3 of 3: People

No mortal concept can match God's thoughts in God's written Word. At Psalm 138:2b God wrote to Himself "You have exalted Your name, Your word, above all" (JPS 1985) including human:

- o writings,
- o religious teachings,
- o traditions,
- o philosophies or theories
- o interpretations of the physical universe, of the past or archaeological and historical sources, or of experience
- o or any other mortal concepts, whether from individuals or group consensus.

A Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah 55:9 retains text lost in the Masoretic Text which reports God saying "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>1</sup> Those who hallow Scripture above all else besides God share God's appraisal of Scripture; those who do not do so reject God's counsel. If any belief system disregards Scripture or does not put it first, and comes to conclusions that oppose Scripture, then it is wrong in such cases.

Notions that the Bible may not always be authoritative are only a recent idea in the church.<sup>2n</sup> Non-fundamentalist historian David Katz candidly admitted in the opening years of the 21st century regarding modern biblical fundamentalism and the 1500's Protestant Reformation "Fundamentalists are actually those whose theological position is closest to the message of the Protestant revolution, while we are the ones who have gone...."<sup>3</sup> As far back as the late first century, *1 Clement* 45:2 has "You have searched the Scriptures, which are true, which were given by the Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

The Scriptures should not be placed among the mythological writings of ancient religions existing simultaneously to Judaism and Christianity. God's disdain for myths is seen in 2 Timothy 4:4 "They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to | myths" (HCSB | TNIV), Titus 1:14 "not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth" (NASB).<sup>5n</sup> 2 Peter 1:16 has "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths" (ESV) and 1:20 has "no prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation" (ConfV) per the Latin Vulgate, and direct from the Greek "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation" (ESV). God's disdain for myths is shown in Scripture, making it evident He would exclude them in His Word.

The Lord did not intend for His Word to ever be doubted by His people. At Psalm 119:160a God wrote to Himself "The entirety of | your words | is truth."<sup>6</sup> The Lord Jesus Christ is translated

<sup>1</sup> Abegg, et al, The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible, page 362.

<sup>2</sup> Biased opposition to Scripture does exist. For instance, in the 1800's "German scholars gathered arguments in favor of pseudonymous origin" of Ephesians.\* They made a specific effort to make a case against Ephesians being written by Paul, despite what it says. Such efforts are common in some circles of "Bible scholars."

Sadly, this has affected Bible publication. Some Bible translations reflect a perspective that Scripture's message is not of utmost truth. Examples include the *New American Bible* -- NOT the NASB -- and the *New Revised Standard Version* which both render Genesis 1:6 to portray the sky as a mythological "dome" covering a flat earth, rather than translate the Hebrew for our sky as "expanse" (JPS 1985, NASB, others) or similar as most naturally fitting what our sky is and what is conveyed by Hebrew.

Some "study Bibles" have notes/articles denying Scripture's truth value. For instance, one says of 200's C.E. enemy of Christianity Porphyry and his redating of Daniel to the 160's B.C.E. this: he "appears to have been a more serious scholar of the Bible" and "his general view is the one accepted by modern scholars"\*\*\* -- praising an enemy of Christianity and claiming a modern consensus on this that is nonexistent.

Wanton disrespect of God Himself has reached Bible publishing: "let us protest against God and demand that God consider alternatives"^^ appears in a "Study Bible."

\* In Metzger, Coogan, The Oxford Companion to the Bible, page 186.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Katz, God's Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism, page 315.

<sup>4</sup> In Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, page 79.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of "myths": fanciful tales found in ancient extrabiblical Jewish writings.

<sup>6</sup> NKJV|Abegg, et al, The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible, page 567|NKJV; passage noted by Prince, Spirit-Filled Believer's Handbook, page 44.

translated into Portuguese at John 10:35b as saying "a Escritura não pode falhar" (ARA) = "the Scripture no/not <=> it-can fail"; it cannot fail to be accurate, and is also translated more directly "as Escrituras Sagradas sempre dizem a verdade" (NTLH) = "the Scriptures Sacred always they-say the truth." If one truly considers Jesus Christ to be Lord, then s/he must live by His decrees.

It has been alleged that those who believe the Bible in all details are idolaters to the Bible. In the early 1900's Bible-believer theologian Howard Crosby observed "we worship no book. We do worship God who sent the Book, and it is no true worship of God that slights the Book which He gives."<sup>1</sup> In reality, those rejecting Scripture reject God as He has revealed Himself; they turn instead either to no God, or to false images of the Divine crafted by human minds -- which is true idolatry, however unwitting and unintentional it may be, including among Christians.

We turn now to the most disappointing aspect of proposed competition to Scripture accepted by Christians: church people claiming authority equal to or above Scripture. Examples:

- Catholic Philip St. Romain "Catholics also recognize sacred Tradition to be an authentic source of Christian understanding" and "Examples of basic forms of Tradition are the Bible..."<sup>2,3n</sup>
- Catholic Alan Schreck "...writings that we now call the New Testament were initially part of the `apostolic tradition,..."<sup>4</sup>
- Catholic David Armstrong "The Bible is part of a Tradition larger than itself."<sup>5</sup>
- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 83 "...the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition"<sup>6</sup>  
"...el Nuevo Testamento mismo atestigua el proceso de la Tradición viva"<sup>7</sup> = "the New Testament itself it-attests the process of the Tradition ↔ living."
- Catholic Robert Witherup "Read the Scripture within 'the living Tradition of the whole Church.'"<sup>8</sup>
- Catholic Anthony Gilles "...we can't read the New Testament outside of the context of this same communal life of God's people – his Church."<sup>9</sup>
- Orthodox Marc Dunaway "The Bible should not be seen as something outside of the church's tradition, but *as part of it.*"<sup>10</sup>
- Orthodox Peter Gillquist The church should "shed the light of holy tradition on those chapters and verses."<sup>11</sup>
- Orthodox Nikolai Velimirovic "...the Scriptures can only be interpreted within the Tradition."<sup>12</sup>
- *Longer Catechism of the Orthodox, Catholic, Eastern Church* 24 Church tradition is "a guide to the right understanding of holy Scripture."<sup>13</sup>

Similar is expressed in Catholic Robert Fox 's claim that Scripture came "through the authority of the Church and Tradition."<sup>14</sup> U. S. Catholic bishops write "Scripture alone is insufficient. Authoritative

<sup>1</sup> In Torrey, The Fundamentals, page 2:171.

<sup>2</sup> St. Romain, Catholic Answers to Fundamentalists' Questions, page 9.

<sup>3</sup> Same book: "The author of Genesis 1, for example, borrowed heavily from Mesopotamian mythology for his creation account" (pg. 14), which associates Genesis 1 with unfactual myths. Such treatment of Scripture is common in approved Catholic writings. Inconsistently, it is not that way regarding the Vatican's extrabiblical "Tradition."

<sup>4</sup> Schreck, Catholic & Christian, page 52.

<sup>5</sup> Armstrong, A Biblical Defense of Catholicism, page 5.

<sup>6</sup> English translation from Latin: Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 26.

<sup>7</sup> Spanish translation from Latin: Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica, page 24.

<sup>8</sup> Witherup, Biblical Fundamentalism: What Every Catholic Should Know, page 44.

<sup>9</sup> Gilles, Fundamentalism: What Every Catholic Needs to Know, page 40.

<sup>10</sup> Dunaway, Orthodox Answers to Frequently Asked Questions, page 27; emphasis his.

<sup>11</sup> Gillquist, Becoming Orthodox, page 71.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Gregory, The Church, Tradition, Scripture, Truth, and Christian Life, page 12.

<sup>13</sup> In Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, page 2:449.

<sup>14</sup> Fox, Protestant Fundamentalism and the Born-Again Catholic, page 47.

teaching is also needed."<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Vatican decreed "an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the church alone"<sup>2</sup> at *Dei Verbum* 10. Orthodox Frank Schaeffer wrote that the church alone provides context to even begin proper interpretation of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Catholic Karl Keating suggested that the basis for believing the authority of Scripture is the church telling us to.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic Vatican decreed "sacred tradition, sacred scripture and the magisterium of the church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others"<sup>5</sup> at *Dei Verbum* 10.

Both Catholicism and Orthodoxy hold Scripture as insufficient; the church is held to be needed.<sup>6n</sup> Paul at 2 Timothy 3:16-7a wrote in Greek "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for | doctrine |, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). Greek αρτιος translated "complete" means "perfectly fit"<sup>7</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>8</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). The New Testament church's Scriptures are all an individual Christian needs to be able to serve fully and at optimum capacity.

The church's relationship to the truth is defined at 1 Timothy 3:15 where the church is called "the pillar and support of the truth" (NASB).<sup>9</sup> The church is in a position to uphold the truth provided it, but never to decide it. To state otherwise is to go against the New Testament church maxim at 1 Corinthians 4:6 in Greek called "το μη υπερ α γεγραπται" literally translated

1. "el no sobre lo que está escrito" <sup>10</sup> = "the not over it that it-is written."
2. "the not beyond what has been written." <sup>11</sup>

If the church is specified to uphold the truth, and no mention is made in the New Testament church's Scriptures of the church determining truth, then it follows that holding the church as determiner of truth is against the New Testament church's Scriptures.

The most common effort to convince people to accept the church over Scripture is that the 397 C.E. Council of Carthage shared by what is now the Orthodox and Catholic bodies determined the New Testament list of books that most Christians accept at present. The Syriac church has a shorter list and the Ethiopic church has a longer list,<sup>12</sup> but most of the Christian world adheres to the fourth century

Does John 16:13a Promise Inerrant Church Leaders?

Jesus said to His apostles "When the Spirit of Truth comes, however, He will guide you into all truth" (NBV). Many Orthodox and Catholics think this means the Spirit would guide their respective leaders to legislate church teaching inerrantly.

This was likely reported to show credibility of the apostles in response to the rebellion alluded to in 3 John. Titus 3:8a-9b says that Christians ought to "be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto |people|: but shun foolish questionings" (ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV|ESV|ASV). Even if John 16:13a was to apply beyond the apostles, not all "questionings" are approved – any unrelated to "good deeds" are not. This means "guide" plus "into all truth" would not necessarily extend to every single curiosity that any church influencer ever had; "into all truth" is on God's prerogative.

<sup>1</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, page 30.

<sup>2</sup> In Flannery, Vatican Council II, page 103-4.

<sup>3</sup> Schaeffer, Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion, page 95.

<sup>4</sup> Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, page 125.

<sup>5</sup> In Flannery, Vatican Council II, page 103.

<sup>6</sup> No place will be given to genuinely anti-Catholic expressions many people engage in, where every conceivable objection to Catholicism -- whether legitimate or not -- is expressed in the nastiest terms possible about Catholics as persons. Disagreement with Catholicism is not anti-Catholic bigotry despite what some pretend. Relevant problems within Catholicism's religious tenets will be discussed as appropriate.

<sup>7</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>8</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>9</sup> Reference in Sungensis, Not By Scripture Alone, page 45.

<sup>10</sup> Lacueva, Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español, page 665.

<sup>11</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 603.

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

<sup>12</sup> Ehrman, Lost Christianities, page 231.



church's list. In fact, this has sometimes led to the claim among Catholics "it is the Church which gave us the Bible"<sup>1</sup> and among the Orthodox "people take the Gospel book, forgetting that the Church gave it to them"<sup>2</sup>; they make these claims because their different denominations each claim credit for determining what books were New Testament Scripture and which were not. It is important that Scripture says at 2 Timothy 3:16a "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV) and this was the teaching of the church secretary-author who wrote this on behalf of God. Scripture comes from God; God is Who is entitled to credit for Scripture. Further, the canon ultimately comes down to God: some books were composed with every part of the texts being "breathed out by God" according to 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV) by the close of the first century, and no group of people in the fourth century could decree between the two nor change one to the other; the church did not and does not determine the Bible.<sup>3n</sup> *Scripture is the written Word of God.*

We must also consider the Muratorian Canon of the church at Rome in the late second century. In this list, they accept only two epistles of John, and accept an Apocalypse of Peter:

"Of course, the epistle of Jude and two with the title 'John' are accepted in the Catholic church, and Wisdom, written by friends of Solomon in his honor. We accept only the apocalypses of John and Peter...."<sup>4</sup>

This canon differs from that decreed at the Council of Carthage and accepted by most of the Christian world including that portion under the leadership of the bishop of Rome. It is commonly alleged by Orthodox apologists and Catholic apologists that the New Testament list of books was a fruit of church tradition. The Orthodox typically hold that their tradition has come from the New Testament period unchanged: "The Apostles in turn delivered this Tradition to the entire Church"<sup>5</sup> and "the Orthodox do not believe Tradition changes or 'develops.'"<sup>6</sup> Regarding the New Testament canon: "And how did these early Christians know which books were authentic and which were not...?"<sup>7</sup> replied with "It was the Apostolic Tradition that aided the Church in making this determination."<sup>8</sup> The Vatican leadership of Catholicism made this official: "By means of this same Tradition, the full canon of the sacred books is known to the church..." at *Dei Verbum* 8.<sup>9</sup> The Muratorian Canon is lethal to this. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 81 says "Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching."<sup>10</sup> Catholicism and Orthodoxy finalized the split in 1054; would the Orthodox acknowledge pre-1054 Rome's input on "Tradition" for the list of authoritative New Testament books? Absolutely; I quote Orthodox priest Theodore Pulcini first:

"I was struck by the Orthodox Church's willingness even today to recognize Rome as the first among equals if only Rome would reject its pretensions. In other words, if Rome again affirmed the early Church's understanding of authority, the Orthodox Church would again recognize Rome's primacy."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gilles, *Fundamentalism: What Every Catholic Needs to Know*, page 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ilarion quoted by Gregory, *The Church, Tradition, Scripture, Truth, and Christian Life*, page 17.

<sup>3</sup> When these denominations' polemicists claim credit for Scripture to address shown disparity between their teachings and Scripture, it is a tacit admission of such disparity and often a brazen assertion of authority over and above what God wrote.

It is common for such groups to assert 'Why trust the Bible if you do not think we are right?' It suggests that belief in God's written Word is seen as expendable.

<sup>4</sup> Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, page 95.

<sup>5</sup> Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology*, page 18.

<sup>6</sup> Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology*, page 18.

<sup>7</sup> Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology*, page 18.

<sup>8</sup> Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology*, page 18.

<sup>9</sup> In Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, page 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, page 26.

<sup>11</sup> Pulcini, *Orthodoxy and Catholicism: What Are the Differences?*, page 8.

Now, I quote Orthodox priest Eusebius Stephanou

"It cannot be denied that the Bishop of Rome had always enjoyed a distinguished position in the Early Undivided Church. But, the important thing to remember is that it consisted of an authority of honor and dignity, and for no other reason, but that he was Bishop of the capital city of the Roman Empire. In other words, he was first among equals [*Primus inter pares*]. And when the capital was moved about A.D. 330 to Constantinople [otherwise called New Rome], the Bishop at this city also acquired the distinction of honor, and he, too was elevated to the rank of *Primus inter pares* alongside of the Bishop of Old Rome."<sup>1</sup>

Instead of Rome, the Bishop of Constantinople/Istanbul has that role.<sup>2</sup> He concludes this essay

"The Holy Orthodox Catholic Church still awaits the blessed day of unity when the Bishop of Rome will repudiate his groundless claims to primacy of authority and infallibility, return to his most honored and historical dignity of *Primus inter pares*, and stand together with the Bishop of New Rome in the company of the Patriarchs of the Ancient Sees of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch."<sup>3</sup>

Now, in light of this, we reexamine the Muratorian Canon of the church at Rome in the late second century. In this list, they accept only two epistles of John, and accept an Apocalypse of Peter:

"Of course, the epistle of Jude and two with the title `John' are accepted in the Catholic church, and Wisdom, written by friends of Solomon in his honor. We accept only the apocalypses of John and Peter...."<sup>4</sup>

This canon differs from the canon decreed at the Council of Carthage and accepted by most of the Christian world including that portion under the leadership of the bishop of Rome. Evidently, the church at Rome did not know in the late second century what New Testament books to accept as Scripture – or, if they did, Rome was off course with "Tradition" in 397 C.E.. If Rome's input on "Apostolic Tradition" was fitting before the Orthodox-Catholic split, then it means that "Apostolic Tradition" did not provide the church at Rome 'handed-down' knowledge of what was to be considered Scripture between New Testament times, through the late second century, to the fourth century. It seems unlikely that any such "Apostolic Tradition" ever existed.

Scripture does refer to approved "tradition." 2 John verse 12 shows that the apostle John preferred to address people in person rather than in writing,<sup>5</sup> but this should not be used to deny the importance of the writings recognized as Scripture in the New Testament church, because 2 Timothy 3:16 indicates they are God's direct production. At 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul as an apostle instructed the Thessalonians to abide by what he and his coworkers taught them, whether by mouth or letter,<sup>6</sup> specifically the "traditions you were taught" (HCSB); these "traditions" were solely of the past and given to and known by ALL members of the Thessalonian church<sup>7</sup> at that time, and not just leaders. In the same epistle, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 instructs Christians to separate themselves from people who do not behave "according to the tradition which ye received from us"<sup>8</sup>; again, this is "received" in past tense and was known by ALL members – not just leaders – of the Thessalonian church at that time.<sup>9n</sup> This cannot possibly refer to teachings only disclosed in later centuries. 1 Corinthians 11:2 also mentions "the traditions" (HCSB) and here Paul commends the Corinthian congregation for

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanou, How the Orthodox Church Differs from Roman Catholicism, page 14.

<sup>2</sup> In Matlins, Magida, How to Be a Perfect Stranger Vol. 2, page 249.

<sup>3</sup> Stephanou, How the Orthodox Church Differs from Roman Catholicism, pages 14-5.

<sup>4</sup> Gamble, The New Testament Canon, page 95.

<sup>5</sup> in Hahn, Seprenant, Catholic for a Reason, page 54.

<sup>6</sup> Shea, By What Authority?, page 79.

<sup>7</sup> J. White, Roman Catholic Controversy, page 96.

<sup>8</sup> In J. Allen, et al, The Orthodox Study Bible – New Testament, page xvi.

<sup>9</sup> The "tradition" at this verse is against "leads an unruly life" (NASB), which means that it refers to conduct in overall life. This is not extrabiblical religious tenets and extrabiblical worship practices commonly called "tradition"/"Tradition."

keeping them,<sup>1</sup> but again these traditions were "the traditions just as I delivered them to you" (HCSB), which again is past tense and were known by ALL members of the Corinthian congregation at that time. Again, this cannot possibly refer to teachings only disclosed in later centuries.

Polycarp<sup>2n</sup> was a student of the apostle John. He expected no further revelations. In his epistle, he wrote at what is now 7:1-2 Greek translated

"whoever twists the sayings of the Lord to suit his own sinful desires and claims that there is neither resurrection nor judgment - well, that person is the firstborn of Satan. Therefore let us leave behind the speculation of the crowd and their false teachings, and let us return to the word delivered to us from the beginning"<sup>3</sup>

then continued that sentence with verbatim Greek quotations from Matthew 6:13 and 26:41. Hence, "the word delivered" was Scripture. This personal pupil of John expected no further Word of God, whether it be called "Scripture" or called by another name.

The intended shift of authority from apostles to Scripture is made evident in Paul's interaction with Timothy. 2 Timothy 1:6 has "For which cause I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee through the laying on of my hands" (ASV), and 1 Timothy 4:14 indicates that Timothy had been appointed to church leadership. Some hints of being something of a successor were there, but instead Paul wrote to him 2 Timothy 3:16-7a "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for |doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). The Greek word translated "complete" is *απτιος* and means "perfectly fit"<sup>4</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>5</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). Paul never instructed his protégé Timothy to assert any kind of authority for himself and for his teachings as a disciple of an apostle or as a person who was "laid hands" over by an apostle and appointed to church leadership; Paul told Timothy to use the Scriptures as entirely sufficient. He continued the thought at 4:1-2 "I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (ASV). This was expected to be final advice; Paul announced his impending death later in chapter 4, and also indicated uncertainty of ever seeing Timothy again before martyrdom.

### A Comparison of Proposed Authorities

We have been discussing Scripture and the church as proposed authorities for Christians to submit to. It is often claimed that to be subservient to both as equals, or to the church first, would not discord with Scripture.

2 Peter 1:1 indicates of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV). Hence, Jesus Christ is God.

Regarding Jesus Christ, Colossians 1:18 states "he is the head of the body, the church" (ASV). Hence, Christ is the head of His body, which is the church. In a healthy body, the head makes all the decisions, and the body does no deciding. Hence, in the church, all the authoritative decisions are made by Christ, and none by the church.

2 Timothy 3:16a says "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV). 2 Peter 1:1 quoted from earlier indicates that Jesus Christ is God; per 2 Timothy 3:16, this means that He holds Authorship to Scripture.

Because all the decisions of a healthy body are made by the head, the authoritative decisions of the church are made by the Head Jesus Christ. Because He authored Scripture, what it says are decisions of the Head. The church is to be subject to Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Whiteford, Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology, page 23.

<sup>2</sup> It has been claimed that Polycarp was a monarchical bishop. However, Polycarp described himself in a letter as "Polycarp and the presbyters with him"\* -- describing himself as one of several presbyters.

\*In Holmes, et al, The Apostolic Fathers, page 207.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes et al, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, pages 213, 215.

<sup>4</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>5</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

Hence, at 2 Timothy 3:15-4:2, Paul indicated that although Timothy had all the makings of what could have been a successor, Timothy was to use Scripture, treat it as sufficient and complete for Christian service, and preach rightly. In post-apostolic times, Scripture is the source of authority.

Paul told Timothy to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" at 2 Timothy 4:13 demonstrating the centrality of Scripture in congregation life.<sup>1</sup> It should be like that always.

### Scripture and the Age of "Traditions"

Going further, what is called "Tradition" among Orthodox, Catholics, and similar groups is not what Scripture refers to as approved "tradition" (NASB). 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 gives a specific:

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

The "tradition" here is not to live undisciplined lives. This is nothing foreign to what is in Scripture now. There is no evidence that this "tradition" was a mass of distinctly-religious tenets distinct from Scripture,<sup>2n</sup> which is the nature of Orthodox, Catholic, and similar "Tradition." 2 Thessalonians 2:15 told its audience to adhere to the "traditions you were taught" (HCSB), but what is approved as "tradition" in Scripture is about regular living, and was not distinct from the contents of Scripture.

This would not be a surprise. The word "traditions" in Judaism referred to passing onward of instruction from earlier teachers, so this would refer to Jesus' teachings.<sup>3</sup> As Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, the only earlier Teacher to pass on "traditions" from would have been Jesus Christ.

Before His ascension, Christ said to His apostles 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" in a past tense – they were to teach future converts what Jesus Christ had taught *up to that time* found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' | doctrine | and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (ESV| KJV, NKJV| ESV). They would have been obeying what Jesus Christ had told them at Matthew 28:20a "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NCV). The "apostles' doctrine" would have been Christ's teachings found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35. Therefore, what the New Testament refers to as "tradition" being passed on to Christians by Christ's apostles would have been simply the same. We see that approved "tradition" at that time was simply what Christ taught during His earthly ministry, and is by no means distinct from what is found in Scripture.

This is likely why at 2 Timothy 3:16-7,<sup>4n</sup> Paul wrote as he awaited martyrdom:

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

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out by R. Kent Hughes article in Dennis, Grudem, ESV Study Bible, page 2574.

<sup>2</sup> Titus 3:8-9 urges "that they who have believed God | may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" (ASV|ESV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|ASV). The "foolish questionings" were such because they had no relevance to "good deeds." What is called "Tradition" among Orthodox, Catholics, and similar are collections of distinctly-religious tenets with no relevance to "good deeds" and which result from such "foolish questionings." Masses of them called "Tradition" are unlikely to have any positive relationship with God.

<sup>3</sup> In Blackaby, et al, The Blackaby Study Bible, page 1435.

<sup>4</sup> Notice it says individual "**person** who serves God" -- NOT `teaching class of clergy.'

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

Greek translated "complete" is *απτός* meaning "perfectly fit,"<sup>1</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>2</sup>; 3:17a can be translated regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). We have seen that New Testament-era approved "tradition" involved teachings about regular living. Per 2 Timothy 3:16-7, by the end of the New Testament era, Scripture was a sufficient embodiment of New Testament-era approved "tradition" for Christians to be "entirely instructed for all good work." This means that from Scripture, we can learn everything we need to do "ALL" that pleases God.

At 2 Timothy 3:15-4:2, Paul told Timothy to use Scripture, treat it as sufficient and complete for Christian service,<sup>3n</sup> and teach rightly. Paul held the Scriptures to be sufficient to pass on the apostles' teachings, and were to be the source of authority in post-apostolic times. Because Paul's epistles are Scripture per 2 Peter 3:15-6, God ultimately wrote this passage. Therefore, let us do as God intended: let us make the New Testament church's Scriptures the sole highest authority.

### Authority for Congregation Governance Now

The only people shown in Scripture to have had general authority over congregations they did not regularly attend were the apostles. When they died, they are not shown having successors; in what we just studied, the authority they held was to be given to Scripture instead.

Church congregations are subject to that authority ultimately. Voluntary submission in a voluntary cooperative group of congregations is one matter, but no person is to claim authority over congregations other than that person's own congregation with which s/he meets. Church congregations may admonish each other to correct their paths according to Scripture,<sup>4n</sup> but they are not in a position to assert 'Do such-and-such or we will do this-or-that against you' toward each other - even when the objection is right. Scripture is the authority above congregational leaderships.

<sup>1</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>3</sup> A new proposed alternative authority to Scripture is 'The Holy Spirit tells me...' The people think 'The Holy Spirit tells me stuff' -- or boast such to add credence to their own opinions. Besides being reminiscent of persons "always talking about|visions, puffed up without reason" (ICB|ESV) at Colossians 2:18, these are subjective feelings with no way to verify their legitimacy. Quite expectably, those asserting their views with claims of atypical 'Spirit-led' status often have unshared 'leadings.'

First of all, God's Spirit should not be expected to contradict God's written Word. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says:

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

--ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído" translated|ASV. The Lord does not tell us one thing and also tell us something contrary. Any person who serves God can trust Scripture. If s/he hears/reads something contrary to it, s/he can be sure which one to trust: Scripture.

Second, the passage shows that Scripture is provided to enable to "the person who serves God" to be "entirely instructed unto every good work." Titus 3:8-9 urges "that they who have believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings" (ASV|ESV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|ASV). The "foolish questionings" were "foolish" because they had no relevance to "good deeds."

The Christian is to take utmost care to "good deeds." Scripture is given to instruct completely in that matter, and that is its 'Book subject.' The Christian is expected to "shun" intellectual pursuits irrelevant to that. Christians should not expect God's Spirit to personally 'reward' undue religious curiosities unrelated to God's priorities for us -- even if they involve attempts at Scripture inference. What is in Scripture can make a "person who serves God" be "entirely instructed unto every good work" -- what s/he needs to do. When a disputable teaching is asserted with a 'The Holy Spirit revealed to me'-type claim, the claim should be rejected.

<sup>4</sup> The late first century letter from Rome to Corinth now named *1 Clement* did just that; they cited Scripture in their urgings to the Corinthian congregation to fix its wrongs.

### Our Procedures for Handling Scripture – Added Basis

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

The axiom on the bottom is from 1 Corinthians 4:6. In it, we have something called in Greek "το μη υπερ α γεγραπται" literally translated

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

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

In the larger passage in which this maxim was applied, Paul is rebuking the Corinthian congregation for boasting of following one teacher more than another. The Corinthian Christians by their boasting were teaching that it was better to follow one person as opposed to another. This was a teaching that was beyond what was written in Scripture, and the disobedience thereof was causing unwanted consequences in the Corinthian congregation.

We have studied three categories of oppositions to full and/or sole authority of Scripture as highest authority for the Christian. The first category was other texts, the second was other sources, and the third was people. In order to more closely follow the New Testament church's Scriptures, which are "breathed out by God" (ESV) per 2 Timothy 3:16, we must follow the New Testament church maxim of 1 Corinthians 4:6. According to the New Testament church maxim at 1 Corinthians 4:6, we must not be mandating or 'encouraging with maybe a little pressure<sup>3n'</sup> any doctrine or practice/non-practice besides what is explicitly mandated, exemplified, or patterned in the New Testament church's Scripture. No doctrine that cannot be backed by the New Testament church's Scriptures *ALONE* can be advanced with such means in the church. Likewise, no practice/non-practice that cannot be shown from the New Testament church's Scriptures *ALONE* can be advanced with such means in the church.

If a doctrine or practice/non-practice is propagated by either mandate or 'maybe a little pressure,<sup>4n'</sup> but is dependent upon

- an additional writing considered a 'revelation,' or
- a Bible translation or a Bible re-wording or Bible explanation, or
- a church leadership directive,

and cannot be derived from the New Testament church's Scriptures *ALONE*, then it is in violation of the New Testament church's Scriptures, which were described as "breathed out by God" (ESV) per 2 Timothy 3:16. There have been cases of such situations from insubordinate disobedience, but in most cases these types of situations are merely due to simple mistake. ■

<sup>1</sup> Lacueva, Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español, page 665.

<sup>2</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 603.

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

<sup>3</sup> This includes any type of activity that would reasonably deter anyone from believing or doing differently. This includes officially or unofficially harming the person's status in the church, taking away opportunities, or raising questions about the devoutness or character of the person in disagreement. 'Pressure' is not limited to these either -- it includes any negative consequence or removal of anything positive in order to address nonconformance itself or nonconformists.

<sup>4</sup> This is explained in the previous note.

## *Part 2: Identifying the Problem and Starting Toward a Solution*

### The Establishment and Duration of the Church

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

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

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.<sup>1n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup>

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

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word<sup>4n</sup> is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>5</sup> This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers.<sup>6n</sup> Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to | them" (NASB|ASV) each newly-saved convert.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### The Church during Jesus' First Followers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

† Harris, Understanding the Bible, page 397.

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Bogusly, some speculators audaciously boast of following evidence closer than others!



'more legitimate' than the church. Gnosticism is pre-Christian and comes from Greek philosophy<sup>1</sup> and pagan ideas.<sup>2</sup> If Jesus was teaching Greek philosophy and paganism in Jewish Palestine, it is unlikely He would have developed a large following. The reason Gnostic rivals to the church were such a problem: Greek philosophy and paganism were popular in the Hellenized areas where the church's main expansion occurred – not because of any legitimacy as an heir to Jesus' legacy.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, page 5.

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Mack, Who Wrote the New Testament, page 75-6.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, How Jesus Became Christian, page 125.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Timothy 3:1-4 says:

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

2 Timothy 4:3-4 adds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Dunaway, Orthodox Answers to Frequently Asked Questions, page 28.

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, A Biblical Defense of Catholicism, page 5.

<sup>5</sup> Orthodoxy disagrees with Catholicism by not accepting the notion of 'development.'

1 Corinthians 11:2 Paul as an apostle mentions "the traditions" (HCSB) and commends the Corinthian congregation for keeping them,<sup>1</sup> but these were "the traditions just as I delivered them to you" (HCSB), which is past tense and were known by ALL members of the Corinthian congregation at that time. At 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul also mentions "traditions" as at 1 Corinthians 11:2. Paul instructed the Thessalonians to abide by what he and his coworkers taught them, whether by mouth or letter,<sup>2</sup> specifically the "traditions you were taught" (HCSB); these "traditions" were solely of the past and given to and known by ALL members of the Thessalonian church<sup>3</sup> at that time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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\* Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura*, page 18.

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

<sup>2</sup> Shea, *By What Authority?*, page 79.

<sup>3</sup> J. White, *Roman Catholic Controversy*, page 96.

<sup>4</sup> In Blackaby, et al, *The Blackaby Study Bible*, page 1435.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> Friberg et al, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 76.

<sup>8</sup> In Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 54.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, there were exceptions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People, page 13.

### The Carnal Flesh

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

Many people see "disagreements" where translated Scripture text has "divisions." The word "divisions" is the translation here for διχοστασια in the ASV, and "seditions" is the translation of διχοστασια in the Geneva Bible, Bishops' Bible, and KJV. Greek διακρισις and διαλογισμος referring to **thought open to question** at Romans 14:1<sup>3</sup> do not appear in this list. To disagree and to divide are two different actions, and διχοστασια for the latter is what is in the Galatians 5:19-21 list.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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

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

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

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

<sup>\*</sup>A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>†</sup>Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

<sup>6</sup>A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>7</sup>Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

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

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

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

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

### After the Apostles

The Reformation was caused by gaps between what was seen in Scripture versus events in Catholic<sup>1n</sup> congregations where the Reformation began, although Orthodoxy was similar. Aberrations from New Testament practice appear as early as the decades around 100 C.E..

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 50 NT.

<sup>3</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, page *Greek Lexicon* 16.

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

<sup>5</sup> Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 191.

<sup>6</sup> Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 194.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They hold "the Roman Pontiff" to be "Peter's successor" and "the bishops, the successors of the apostles" per *Catechism* 880.<sup>5</sup> Both denominations claim that monarchical bishops have run churches since the apostles' time. In Scripture and in history, this is not what we see.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 99.

<sup>4</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 229.

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 233.

<sup>6</sup> Jefford et al, Reading the Apostolic Fathers, page 62.

<sup>7</sup> Jefford et al, Reading the Apostolic Fathers, pages 62-3.

<sup>8</sup> Jefford et al, Reading the Apostolic Fathers, page 63.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> ARA| English W. Tyndale New Testament 1526.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

### The Closing of the New Testament Era

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

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

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

1 Timothy 6:3-4a clarifies further:

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> As quoted by DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 31.

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

<sup>3</sup> As quoted by DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 31.

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

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

<sup>5</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

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

### The Effects

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, page 137.

<sup>4</sup> Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, page 42.

In the early 400's, Nestorius denied that Mary was "Mother of God" because it was unscriptural and was most suited to people who denied Christ's humanity.<sup>1</sup> He had good reason to do so, as God existed before Mary and so she could not be God's mother. He held that Jesus Christ was a divine being and human being united in one Person,<sup>2</sup> which differed from Gnosticism's ideas that Jesus and Christ remained separate entities. What caused hostility was his rejection of the Mary title, and the whole argument was a pointless dispute of specifics about how Jesus Christ was both human and divine – one of those Titus 3:8-9 "foolish questionings" (ASV). Nestorius and bishops who agreed with him were condemned and ejected from fellowship<sup>3</sup> by dominant leaders. Several eastern bishops who agreed with Nestorius united and formed a separate church group<sup>4</sup> in response.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Trimmingham, Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, page 161.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> R. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology, page 232.

<sup>7</sup> Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 16.

<sup>8</sup> Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 30.

<sup>9</sup> Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 31.

<sup>10</sup> Sundkler, Steed, A History of the Church in Africa, page 30.

<sup>11</sup> Isichi, A History of Christianity in Africa, page 33.

<sup>12</sup> Roberson, The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey, page 34.

<sup>13</sup> Trimmingham, Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, page 137.

<sup>14</sup> R. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology, page 232.

<sup>15</sup> Moffett, A History of Christianity in Asia, page 1:193.

<sup>16</sup> In Dowley, The Baker Atlas of Christian History, page 85 map.

<sup>17</sup> González, The Story of Christianity, page 1:261.

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

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

This was a violent time. In 1408, when England was Catholic, the Oxford Council prohibited Scripture editions in common languages<sup>6</sup> after the John Wycliffe Bible in Middle English was being circulated.<sup>7n</sup> Catholic authorities in Belgium apprehended English translator William Tyndale to get him martyred in England in 1536.<sup>8</sup> The first complete Bible translation into Spanish from texts in the original languages was done by Cassiodoro/Casiodoro de Reyna/Reina, a refugee from the Spanish Inquisition,<sup>9</sup> in 1569. Cypriano/Cipriano de Valera finished a 1602 revision of the 1569 Reina Bible; he was another refugee from the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>10</sup> Predecessor Francisco de Enzinas, despite a special effort to avoid offending anyone with his 1543 New Testament translation, was imprisoned yet escaped and his translation was suppressed.<sup>11</sup> In Orthodox territory, a 1600's translation into modern Greek done by Archimandrite Maximos Kallipolites had a preface by sponsor Kyrillos Loukaris which reports that it had opponents who wanted to keep people from knowing the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> This opposition to Scripture being accessible to the masses either by availability, by literacy, or both was common then due to the fact that these church authorities did not see how the Scriptures would support the legitimacy of the operations of the congregations that they led.

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<sup>1</sup> Jenkins, Lost History of Christianity, page 4.

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

<sup>3</sup> Stephanou, How the Orthodox Church Differs from Roman Catholicism, page 5.

<sup>4</sup> Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 32.

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, The English Bible From KJV To NIV, page 20.

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup> González, La Era de los Reformadores, page 211.

<sup>10</sup> E. North, The Book of a Thousand Tongues, page 307.

<sup>11</sup> E. North, The Book of a Thousand Tongues, page 304.

<sup>12</sup> Vaporis, Translating the Bible into Modern Greek, pages 7-8.

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

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

Füsslin reported "There was a great difference between Anabaptists and Anabaptists..."<sup>3</sup> For there to have been such a large quantity and wide variation among them even as the Reformation began, the Anabaptists had to have been a pre-Reformation mass, as Hossius reported. Some Protestants sought to suppress the Anabaptists before Catholicism.<sup>4</sup> As a class of Christian groups, the Anabaptists may have been centuries old already. Attempts like theirs to recreate New Testament-era congregation practice contributed to the Reformation, and ultimately to the Restoration<sup>5n</sup> in the 1800's.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### A Basis for Christian Agreement -- Preliminary

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

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

### Our Procedures for Handling Scripture – Full Basis

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

In Scripture, what is called "Scripture" is not always just the Old Testament. At what is now 1 Timothy 5:18 God through Paul wrote "the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire" (ASV); the first quote of "the scripture" here is from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the second is from Luke 10:7.<sup>3</sup> Compare the Greek:

Luke 10:7 end

1 Timothy 5:18 second quote

αζιλος γαρ ο εργατης του μισθου αυτου

Αζιλος ο εργατης του μισθου αυτου<sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, pages 246, 733.

<sup>5</sup> In Douglas, New Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page 246.

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

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

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

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).<sup>3n</sup> To "handle aright the word of truth" we need to learn it and how to use it right. All individuals with access to the written Word of God have a duty to make this effort<sup>4n</sup> for themselves.

Accuracy and Thoroughness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

^\* NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

<sup>3</sup> Intentionally mishandling Scripture to appear to `win' arguments violates this verse.

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

In seeking to understand New Testament Scripture fully, it is impossible to do so without considering the New Testament church's text and the New Testament church's world. The New Testament was not written in English direct to Americans. The New Testament was written in a dialect of ancient Greek, and in and to a world with cultures and religious systems different from ours. It is important to always remember that. Refusing to consider<sup>1n</sup> the New Testament churches' Bible texts in the New Testament churches' languages and refusing to consider the New Testament churches' world is unwillingness to fully identify with the New Testament church. Hence, when we read a Scripture passage, we must be willing to adopt the meaning/s of its initial intended audience, and not necessarily what comes to our minds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Lacueva, *Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español*, page 665.

<sup>4</sup> McReynolds, *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*, page 603.

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



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

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

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

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

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

In order to more closely follow the New Testament church's Scriptures, which are "breathed out by God" (ESV) per 2 Timothy 3:16, more of us need to follow the New Testament church maxim of 1 Corinthians 4:6. To do this, no precept that is not indisputably and explicitly stated,<sup>6n</sup> principled, exemplified, or patterned in the New Testament church's Scripture ALONE<sup>7n</sup> should be stated or `encouraged with maybe a little pressure<sup>8n</sup> the church.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> Described in first note on this page.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Careless Accusations and When an Inference from Scripture is an OPINION

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

Scripture has "**things hard to understand**" (NASB) per 2 Peter 3:16.<sup>6</sup> When one Christian suspects teachings in passages and another truly does not, then the genuinely disputed inference is not 'explicit and unmistakable' and is an *OPINION*. The same is also true of any collection/code of rules for inference. **No matter its age or how convinced** anyone is on such an inference or code, **it is still an opinion**. Opinions can be right, but wrongful accusation never is.

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

<sup>2</sup> Explained in previous note.

<sup>3</sup> Explained in first note on this page.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Pointed out in Stanley, Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible, page 1478.

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

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

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

About the latter, some use New Testament passages to 'trump' passages used by people they disagree with, thereby creating apparent contradictions by setting Scripture against itself; rather, we should allow Scripture to work together to explain itself, which means we consider and use all New Testament passages to get the most comprehensive and accurate<sup>3n</sup> reconstruction possible of the New Testament congregations' teachings and practices as led by the Lord Jesus Christ's personal apostles.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>†</sup> Biblical faith is explained in *Part 4/The Basics of Salvation*.

<sup>2</sup> Versification was added to editions of Scripture in the 1500's.

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

<sup>4</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruido para toda buena obra" translated.

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

### A Basis for Christian Agreement -- Finale

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

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

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

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

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

Both Old and New Testament<sup>2n</sup> Scripture points us to Jesus Christ, and is provided for the purpose of promoting good works.<sup>3n</sup> Even if one thinks Scriptural inerrancy only applies to some topics, we can all expect Scripture to be fully accurate in its *purpose*: promoting what is good to do. The same Scripture points us to biblical faith<sup>4n</sup> in Jesus Christ. Acts 11:26 reports "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB), and so to be a Christian there is *a duty to follow Jesus Christ – a duty that all true Christians agree on*.

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

Are Biblical Authority and Church Unity Mutually Exclusive? Absolutely not! Many people wrongly think they are. The truth: if Scripture is used <b>according to its purpose</b> , the former should lead to the latter.
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### A Recap and Look Back to the New Testament Era

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Biblical faith is explained in Part 4.

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

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

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

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word<sup>3n</sup> is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>4</sup> This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers.<sup>5n</sup> Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to | them" (NASB|ASV) each newly-saved convert.

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At Titus 2:1-8a, Paul wrote

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

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

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

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

Here, "sound doctrine" is opposed by people "of the circumcision," who tried to convince Christians that they were bound by the Judaic Law, affecting all areas of life. Per Galatians 5:4, they were teaching that salvation was through it. This denied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup> because He

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

<sup>2</sup> Bíblia de Estudo Almeida, page NT 262.

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

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

The allusion to "the doctrine of the Christ" opposes "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (NASB) in verse 7. Gnostics of the first two centuries disliked ideas of any divine being having a physical body; those pretending to be Christians denied that Jesus Christ is one Person in flesh.<sup>2</sup> They "denieth that Jesus is the Christ" (ASV) per 1 John 2:22.<sup>3</sup> The "goes too far" (NASB) refers to Gnostic views that rejecting "the doctrine of the Christ"<sup>4</sup> was 'gnosis/knowledge beyond' that of 'common Christians.' Rejecting that Christ had a physical body would deny a "first" truth of the Gospel per 1 Corinthians 15:3 "Christ died for our sins" (ASV).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Open Bible, page 1247.

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

<sup>4</sup> KJV | McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 874.

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

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

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

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

These religious speculations were religious notions and/or ideas of ceremony for individuals or for group meetings. Often without being aware of it, many people have become pride-filled over their religious speculations and/or those of their group because they thought those religious opinions exalted them over other Christians. Doctrine of regular Christian life is simple; religious speculations had more glamour and were pride-inflating, prompting many to value these more. Often, these were group matters. Many also took what were at first simple meetings of Christ's followers and inflated them to temple-like status, paralleling other religions. Combined, many have come to see Christianity as a temple<sup>5n</sup> ceremony-centered religion, and group religious opinions as what Christianity is about.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Disjoint from church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for 'disliked view' or 'religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."\* It also means "choosing."<sup>†</sup> 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.

<sup>†</sup>Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

<sup>2</sup> A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>3</sup> Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, page 1423.

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

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

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

⇨ Thoughts on Many Age-Old Modern Disputes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Evidently, congregations were normally expected to make their own orders on their own.

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

\* Hawkins, A Heritage in Crisis, page 138.

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV.

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

The Lord Jesus Christ's church is the Lord's, and is simply the collective of all who have become individual followers of Jesus Christ in daily life<sup>1n</sup> – nothing more, and not one person less.<sup>2n</sup> Regardless of Christians' views on modern congregational matters, functional Christian unity can be facilitated if more Christians would be effectually mindful of the church's simple roots.

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

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

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

Lessons of Both: To curb division, we do not need to agree on which religious details 'need' uniformity of opinion, get and press a consensus on them, drop opinions on other matters, and preempt further similar disagreements. Changes of mind on opinions about religious details are not what is needed; changes of heart regarding reaction to disagreement on opinions about religious details are what is needed<sup>3n</sup> – we need changes of heart, not mind.

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

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

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

### Relevance in Scripture of Agreement to Unity

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

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Campbell wrote in 1809 the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> There are admonitions to congregations to have "the same mind":

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

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

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

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

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

### To Reinstate the New Testament-Era Unity

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

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

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

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

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament-era Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word<sup>3n</sup> is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers. Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to| them" (NASB|ASV) each newly-saved convert.

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

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine| and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (NKJV|ESV). The "apostles' doctrine" kept unity in the church throughout the New Testament era<sup>6</sup> – and here the apostles would have been obeying what Jesus Christ had told them at Matthew 28:20a "Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NCV). The "apostles' doctrine" would have been Christ's teachings found in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

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

(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup>A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>5</sup>Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

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

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

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

'Somebody Has to Be Wrong.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

Opinions and the Church

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

**What This Does NOT Say:**

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

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

\* Hawkins, A Heritage in Crisis, page 138.

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Evidently, congregations were normally expected to make their own orders on their own.

<sup>4</sup> ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV.

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

upright living. However, it is given "so that the person who serves God" can be "entirely instructed" to do "all good work." Scripture urges at Titus 3:8 "that they who have believed God may be careful to |devote themselves to good |deeds" (ASV|ESV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996). What is stated in Scripture is sufficient for us to know what is important to the Lord<sup>1n</sup> and what He wants us to do. What is stated in Scripture is sufficient for us to concern ourselves with to serve Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, page 1423.

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

<sup>6</sup> NASB|NBV|NASB|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV.

<sup>7</sup> in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1257.

onto itself or parts of itself. As influencers speculated, and built factions around agreement with their speculations, a common result was various factions promoting<sup>1n</sup> themselves by teaching and debate.<sup>2n</sup> Often, this has been a main priority of various factious denominations/'fellowships'/'brotherhoods.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* in Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1519.

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

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

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

Therefore, many have come to assume wrongly that the church should mainly be a teaching and debating institution,<sup>1n</sup> with any benevolence being limited and/or of lesser importance. This is entirely wrong per Hebrews 10:24-5<sup>2n</sup>; benevolence is the very purpose of congregations in Scripture.

The church's task is simple: we are to follow Christ's teachings in overall life, and also make Him more disciples who will do the same. The church should be doing good deeds<sup>3n</sup> and evangelism.

The Mennonites are a continuation of the Anabaptists, who commonly tried to replicate New Testament-era practice.<sup>4n</sup> In the 1900's, Mennonites were much less affected by modernism<sup>5n</sup> than by fundamentalism<sup>6</sup> and tended to the latter,<sup>7</sup> while Mennonite organizations worldwide stay active in benevolence.<sup>8</sup> They are a harmonious denomination despite varying worship practices worldwide<sup>9</sup> – an example to the rest of the church.<sup>10n</sup> In another part of the Lord's church, John Wesley, whose legacy includes the Wesleyan, Nazarene, Methodist and Holiness denominations,<sup>11n</sup> wanted the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Another term used to describe the same thing is "theological liberalism."

<sup>6</sup> In Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History, page 415-6.

<sup>7</sup> In S. Ferguson, Wright, New Dictionary of Theology, page 420.

<sup>8</sup> In Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History, page 419-20, 431.

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

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

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

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

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

^† Lane, Exploring Christian Thought, page 169.

American part of the movement "simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."<sup>1</sup> John Wesley's living quarters were a congregation building, plus a school for poor children, a shelter for orphans and other unfortunates, a free medical facility for the needy, and a place where Christians could deposit money to go to poverty-stricken families.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, J. Wesley was a traveling preacher.<sup>3</sup> He rode on horseback 5000 miles per year consistently for years<sup>4</sup> while preaching several times a day until age 70.<sup>5</sup> Efforts to 'go back to the Bible' should lead the church to make good deeds a priority and to make preaching for converts to Christ a priority. 'Going back to the Bible' should show that not only are these not mutually exclusive, they cannot be rightly separated. Matthew 5:16 says "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (ASV); we should be doing good deeds to make the Lord good to people.

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Outler, et al, The Wesleyan Theological Heritage, page 149.

<sup>2</sup> Keysor, Our Methodist Heritage, page 24.

<sup>3</sup> Keysor, Our Methodist Heritage, page 25.

<sup>4</sup> Lane, Exploring Christian Thought, page 169.

<sup>5</sup> González, The Story of Christianity, page 2:214.

<sup>6</sup> Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

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

<sup>8</sup> Vos, Exploring Church History, page 135.

<sup>9</sup> Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Part 3: A Lesson of God Giving His Word*

#### The Point Introduced

2 Timothy 3:16-7a says "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for | doctrine |, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). Greek translated "complete" is  $\alpha\rho\tau\iota\omicron\varsigma$  and means "perfectly fit,"<sup>1</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>2</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show of Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). This was written to the New Testament church and describes their Old Testament and their Greek New Testament. However, the Greek New Testament's delivery was spread out over every part of the Christian world. Every part of the church was needed to contribute to the Christian being "entirely suited." Christians need the whole church.

#### North of the Mediterranean Sea

Paul's epistles to specific churches were to places on the north side of the Mediterranean Sea. At Romans 15:28 Paul wrote to the Romans that "when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain" (NASB). 2 Timothy 3:16 has "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV), so we know Paul must have eventually ministered in Spain.<sup>3n</sup>

Paul's general letter is presently called "Ephesians" due to a later addition. Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in any surviving pre-399 C.E.<sup>4</sup> Greek manuscripts found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The original text without the unauthorized addition can be closely translated as "to the saints | existing and | faithful in Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup> This epistle was to a general audience.

Most of Paul's letters, however, were to either specific people or specific congregations. Paul's letters in Scripture to specific congregations have the following distribution:

Asia Minor: Galatians, Colossians;  
East Europe: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians;  
West Europe: Romans.

These have a spread over the east parts and west part of the church north of the Mediterranean Sea.

2 Peter was universal, but 1 Peter was addressed to people in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (NBV) per 1 Peter 1:1. These were Roman provinces in what is now Asia Minor. These were in the eastern part of the church, and north of the Mediterranean.

<sup>1</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>3</sup> Not that Scripture needs to be corroborated, but the effects of this then-future missionary journey are visible. First, according to ancient author Strabo, the only language in use in Spain was Latin, and Paul's latest letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus used 160 specifically-Latin words or phrases, and compound words, a matter of Latin style, are found in these latest epistles of Paul.\*

A letter of the church of Rome, now called 1 Clement, was written in the late first century; at what is now chapter 5, it reports Paul's trip to Spain,<sup>†</sup> that he "had preached in the East and in the West, he won the genuine glory for his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world and having reached the farthest limits of the West."<sup>††</sup>

The "farthest limits of the West" would have been the west coast of the province of Spain. A congregation existed in Spain at Tarragona during the first century.<sup>‡</sup>

\* Interpreter's Bible, page 11:362.

† Open Bible, page 1191.

†† Holmes et al, The Apostolic Fathers, page 35.

‡ Fragomeni et al, Blest Are We: The Story of Our Church, Junior High Edition, Parish Catechist's Guide, page 222 map.

<sup>4</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

<sup>5</sup> KJV, ASV| translation "and" plus the verb tense per Marshall, Interliner NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament, page 556; verb meaning per Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 289, 131 and Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 119| KJV, ASV.

### South of the Mediterranean Sea

The Epistle to the Hebrews has been enigmatic for centuries. It never identifies its author, and Paul is only a tradition. No one is certain who wrote it, or whom it was to – although it is commonly thought to be Jews outside Israel.<sup>1</sup> We need to consider both of these topics in turn.

There are a number of considerations against authorship by Paul. Paul in all his recognized epistles uses both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek Old Testament translation while the author of this book used only the Greek translation.<sup>2</sup> The Greek of the epistle is also smoother than in the recognized Pauline letters.<sup>3</sup> Further, Paul always gave his name in his epistles,<sup>4</sup> but Hebrews does not identify an author.

At the turn at the end of the second century C.E., Tertullian in his *De Pudicitia* quoted "an epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas" and this is the oldest indication of authorship.<sup>5</sup> This seems to indicate that at Tertullian's time and in northern Africa, "Barnabas" was actually the name of the epistle.<sup>6</sup> Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus per Acts 4:36. Jews of Cyprus had Hellenistic backgrounds,<sup>7</sup> meaning Greek cultural perspectives. He would have known Greek from birth and probably would have been raised with use of the Septuagint. He would have been well versed in the Judaic Law since the priesthood was a family matter of the Levites. He would have shown influence of Paul through his extensive travel and work with Paul. G. Edmunson pointed out that "word of |encouragement" (KJV|NBV) at Hebrews 13:22 fits well with Barnabas's nickname "Son of Encouragement" at Acts 4:36 (NASB)<sup>8</sup> – the last words of each translate the same Greek word παρακλήσεως. Barnabas seems to have identified himself as author for posterity by making use of his church nickname. In light of these considerations, we accept Barnabas as author of Hebrews.

Next, we consider to whom it was written. According to the fourth century *Church History* by Eusebius at 2:16:1, "they say that this Mark was the first that was sent to Egypt, and he proclaimed the Gospel which he had written, and first established churches in Alexandria."<sup>9</sup> The date of Eusebius's *Church History* is 326 C.E..<sup>10</sup> A possibly opposing tradition is found in the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, specifically *Homily 1:8ff*. This tradition holds that Barnabas was the first preacher in Alexandria.<sup>11</sup> The date of the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* is 313-25 C.E..<sup>12</sup> Such traditions likely reflect material as old as at least the late third century C.E. or before. We would likely hold both traditions to be unreliable if the following two things had not occurred:

1. There is Scriptural evidence for both of them;
2. They are reconcilable.

Barnabas and Mark did travel together per Scripture, and they may have headed to Egypt together if they continued in a direction they are shown in Scripture taking together. At Acts 15:35-41, Paul and Barnabas were together in Antioch, and then wanted to start another missionary journey together.

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<sup>1</sup> In O'Day, Petersen, The Access Bible, page 338 NT.

<sup>2</sup> Open Bible, page 1211.

<sup>3</sup> Open Bible, page 1211.

<sup>4</sup> Open Bible, page 1211.

<sup>5</sup> In Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1781.

<sup>6</sup> Matching this, a 300's list of books in 500's Codex Claromontanus has an "Epistle of Barnabas" that Theodor Zahn suggested was actually Hebrews\* as no "Hebrews" is listed. According to the line counts reported, it was shorter than Romans. An anonymous treatise later called "Epistle of Barnabas" is longer than Romans. Claromontanus came from western Europe,\*\* so evidently in that area Hebrews was ascribed to Barnabas.

\* In Hennecke, Schneemelcher, New Testament Apocrypha, pages 1:45-6.

\*\* Lightfoot, How We Got the Bible, page 59.

<sup>7</sup> McDonald, Porter, Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature, page 521.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, Redating the New Testament, page 218.

<sup>9</sup> In Schaff and Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, page 1:16.

<sup>10</sup> Goodspeed, A History of Early Christian Literature, page 310.

<sup>11</sup> Bigg, The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, page 136.

<sup>12</sup> Goodspeed, A History of Early Christian Literature, page 127.



However, Barnabas was intent on Mark coming along, and Paul was unwilling. They split up. Paul instead chose Silas to make a journey and Barnabas took Mark on a journey. Paul and Silas went toward Cilicia per Acts 15:40-1, and Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus per Acts 15:39. On a map, it is shown that they went in literally opposite directions: Paul and Silas went a northeast route, while Barnabas and Mark started a southwest route.<sup>1</sup> Had this continued, Barnabas and Mark would have gone into Egypt, as apparent third century church legend indicates. Thriving Jewish Christian communities did come to exist during the first century in Cyprus and in Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

Alexandria in Egypt had the largest Jewish community outside Palestine<sup>3</sup>; Philo wrote of varying forms of Judaism there including "extreme allegorists."<sup>4</sup> Evangelism could have yielded a community of Jewish Christians. We recall what Barnabas used for Old Testament Scripture: the Greek Old Testament Septuagint translation exclusively. This would less-likely happen for an audience in Aramaic-speaking Palestine; Barnabas would likely have done at least some translating of the Semitic Old Testament into Greek like Paul did. The Greek Old Testament Septuagint translation was made in Egypt. All this favors a target audience of Egyptian Jewish Christians.

We also consider popularity of applying Greek philosophy to Scripture interpretation among Alexandria-area Jews; its popularity there prompted influential Philo to urge restraint.<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 8 and 10 parallel the shadow image of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>6</sup> Such use of Greek philosophy and allegory in Old Testament interpretation would have suited an audience of Alexandria-area Christian Jews.

Further support of this is P46, found in Egypt. P46 comes from the late first century to early second century,<sup>7</sup> or c. 100. What is of note is that it contains Hebrews, and this is the only New Testament writing it contains which does not have Paul for secretary-author. For Hebrews to have been attached to this Egyptian papyrus despite authorship, it was likely of local character.

When we see the target audience of Hebrews to be among Egyptian Jewish Christians, some first century church history of Egypt can be derived. In Acts 2, Peter taught Jews to believe first and then repent, but Hebrews 6:1-2 has "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us | press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from | acts that lead to death | and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment" (NKJV|NASB|ICB|NASB). This suggests that the audience's conversion experience was to repent of sin first and then to turn to faith.<sup>8n</sup> This supports evangelism by Mark, who may have followed the method of Mark 1:15 "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (KJV).

The main point of this study of the origin of Hebrews is this: one New Testament epistle was written specifically to Christians south of the Mediterranean Sea.

### The Point Made

2 Timothy 3:16-7a says "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for | doctrine |, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete" (ESV|KJV, NKJV|ASV). The Greek word translated "complete" is *απτιος* and means "perfectly fit,"<sup>9</sup> "entirely suited; complete"<sup>10</sup>; the relevant phrase in 3:17a can be translated to show regarding Scripture "It is God's way of preparing us in every way" (NLT 1996). This was written to the New Testament church and describes their Old Testament and their Greek New Testament. This Greek New Testament was also to make the servant of God "entirely suited; complete."

<sup>1</sup> Per map and arrows in Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1604.

<sup>2</sup> Life Application Study Bible, page 2186.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Scholer in Yonge, The Works of Philo Complete and Unabridged, pages xi-xii.

<sup>4</sup> In Coogan, Oxford History of the Biblical World, page 498.

<sup>5</sup> Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History, pages 207, 238.

<sup>6</sup> Ehrman, The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, page 381.

<sup>7</sup> In Comfort, The Origin of the Bible, page 186.

<sup>8</sup> The author invites others to try to glean more about early Egyptian Christianity.

<sup>9</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>10</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

However, the Greek New Testament's delivery was spread out over every part of the Christian world. Part of it was directed specifically as initial audience to Christians in the eastern Christian world north of the Mediterranean, part was directed to Christians in the western Christian world north of the Mediterranean, and part was directed south of the Mediterranean. Palestine/Syria and Parthian-held Mesopotamia already had the Old Testament delivered to them. This Old Testament and the Greek New Testament are those Scriptures that can make the Christian "entirely suited" per 2 Timothy 3:16-7. For those Scriptures to be put together for this purpose, every part of the Christian world was needed to provide the portion delivered to it.

Noting 2 Timothy 3:16-7, it seems God had a plan in how He delivered Scripture. Every portion of the ancient Christian world had something to contribute for the whole church to have "All Scripture" (ESV) so that the Lord's servants could be "complete" (ASV). Without every portion of the church, we would not have "All Scripture" to make us ἀρτιος "perfectly fit,"<sup>1</sup> "entirely suited; complete."<sup>2</sup> If every portion of the church was needed to collect the deposit of the written Word of God, it suggests that the same is true in using those Scriptures to serve the Lord "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" (RVR 1909) = "entirely instructed in-order-for all good work."

### The Lesson of the Point and 1 Corinthians 12

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.<sup>3n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>4</sup> In Greek lexicons, the words have separate entries. 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.

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. To New Testament Greek-reading/hearing Christians, one meaning of the word<sup>5n</sup> is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>6</sup> This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples"; "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). Hence, at Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ was establishing His one community of followers. Per Acts 2:47, the Lord Himself is "adding to | them" (NASB | ASV)<sup>7n</sup> each newly-saved convert.

<sup>1</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 54.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> It is a good thing for many that a person's membership in Christ's church is done by the Lord. If people who wish to be separate from others in Christ's church could actually make that happen, they would exclude themselves -- to their own peril.

Jesus Christ's church had not been instituted at Matthew 16:15-8, as He said "I will build My church" (NBV). 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). Note use of a past tense "I have taught you" - the church was to be doing the things Christ had taught up to then, recorded in the gospels and Acts 20:35. These teachings were mostly about godly living and good deeds in regular life.

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).<sup>1n</sup> 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, and 12:20-5 says:

"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, but that the members may have the same care for one another [ESV].

This passage teaches that no one part of the body can say 'I have no use for you' or 'I have no need of you.' The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one body. One part of the Lord's church cannot rightly say to another 'We have no need of you' or 'We have no use for you.'

The passage also says that the body's members should "have the same care for one another" (ESV). A part of the Lord's body should not care more for one other part than for another part. This means that parts of the church should not care more for some parts and less for others.

2 Timothy 3:16-7 says of 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."<sup>2</sup>

Scripture is given "so that the person who serves God" can be "entirely instructed" to do "all good work." Such good works were the primary component of Jesus Christ's preaching.

The church, which is the community of followers of Jesus Christ, is one body. We have observed how the whole church was needed to assemble the Scriptures together so that everyone "who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work." Likewise, the whole church is needed for the church to do what Scripture tells it to do for Jesus Christ. ■

<sup>1</sup> We have discussed the Epistle to the Hebrews some here in Part 3. It is worthy of note that while it says Christ offers a "better covenant," it never suggests a "better law."\* Not once is it suggested that Jewish Christians stop living as Jews.

James said at Acts 15:19-20 during the Jerusalem Council "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 began at Acts 15:23 "From the apostles, and elders" (NCV). Jewish-Christians continued to follow the Law of Moses. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses" (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24.

Some Christians followed the Judaic Law; others did not. Christians did not share identical worship styles\*\* during the New Testament-era. We are not made one church by common worship events; rather, we are made one church by the Lord.

\* From Daniel Juster quoted by Rausch, Messianic Judaism, page 134.

\*\* Noted in Lucado, The Inspirational Bible, page 1265.

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

*Part 4. What People Are Christians*

*The Basics of Salvation*

- † **1 Corinthians 15** verse 1b "the gospel which I preached" (ASV), 15:2a "and by which you are saved" (NBV), 15:3b-5a "this was what was most important: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say; that he was buried and was raised to life on the third day as the Scriptures say, and that he showed himself to..." (ICB).
- † **1 Peter 2:24a** and **2 Corinthians 5:21** "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (ESV) and "he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (ESV).
- † **Romans 1:17a** "The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself – that it begins and ends with faith" (NCV).

*Believe:*

1. **Acts 16:31b** "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (ASV|NASB).
2. **Acts 10:43b** "every one that believeth on him [receives] remission of sins" (ASV|ESV|ASV).
3. **Romans 4:5**<sup>1a</sup> "And to the one| who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."<sup>2</sup>
4. **Ephesians 2:8-10** "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).

*Repent:*

1. **Luke 24:47b** "repentance |para = in-order-for| remission of sins should be preached in| His name" (ASV|RVA and translated| ASV|NBV).<sup>3a</sup>
2. **Acts 3:19a** "Arrepentei-vos, pois, e convertei-vos para |serem cancelados os vuestros pecados" (ARC|ARA) = "You-people-must-repent-you, therefore, and you-people-must-convert-you in-order-for they-will-be canceled the your sins."

*Make It Active – General and Specific*

1. **Acts 26:20b** "they must repent and turn to God and do works consistent with repentance" (NBV).
2. **Acts 2:38b** "You-people-must-repent-you| -- |and so| let-s/he-get-self-baptized each one of you-people| in the name of Jesus Christ -- |in order to the remission of |you-people's sins"<sup>4</sup>
3. **1 Peter 3:20b-1** "water : which also after a |figure| doth now save you, even baptism,| not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a |clear conscience,| by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>
4. **Romans 10:9** "That if you might confess in| your mouth Jesus as Lord, and |might trust| in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."<sup>6</sup>
5. **James 2:18b** and **2:26b** "I will show you my faith by my works" (NASB) and "faith without deeds is dead" (TNIV).
6. **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).
7. **Philippians 2:12b** "ocupaos en vuestra salvación" (RVR 1909/1960/1995, RVA) = "You-busy-you in your salvation."

1 Corinthians 15:1-12, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and 1 Peter 2:24 describe how Christ died on the cross bearing our sins and then was resurrected. Romans 4:8 has "blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin" (ESV). We see salvation's mechanism: *Christ was resurrected after dying without sin for our sins, and in exchange for the latter, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us rather than our sins.*

Acts 16:31b says "Believe on the Lord Jesus |, and you will be saved" (ASV|NASB). To truly believe Jesus to be Lord, we submit our wills to His will = obedience. Hebrews 3:18b-9 has "to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were |not obedient|? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief" (NASB|BishB|ESV). "Believe" = be "obedient." Romans 10:16-7 says "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So |faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (ESV|TNIV). To 'obey the Gospel' is to believe it.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 4's example is Abraham from before the Judaic Law, so "work" here is general.

<sup>2</sup> ESV|A. Campbell et al, Living Oracles, page 290.

<sup>3</sup> The oldest Greek manuscripts have equivalent for "for" rather than KJV "and" here.

-- Fitzmeyer, The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV, page 1520.

<sup>4</sup> RVR 1909, 1960, 1995 "Arrepentios" translated| C. Williams, The New Testament in the Language of the People, page 261| a meaning of Greek και: Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 694 NT|RVR 1909, 1960, 1995 "bautícese cada uno de vosotros" translated| C. Williams, *ibid.*| A. Campbell et al, Living Oracles, page 234| RVA "vuestros pecados" translated.

<sup>5</sup> ASV|BishB|ASV|NASB|RSV 1952|KJV; insight from "Baptism, which is symbolized by that water" (ISV).

<sup>6</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 576| NASB|McReynolds, *ibid.*| NASB, NBV.

Salvation is granted upon such faith, as seen most clearly in two passages:

Romans 4:5 "And to the one who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."<sup>1</sup>

Ephesians 2:8-10 "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).

The oldest manuscripts of "Ephesians" have no Greek for "at Ephesus"<sup>2</sup>; it was a general letter. These two passages are important, because they show that plural "works" do not cause salvation; other than faith, nothing we do, whether devised by mortals or ordained by God, causes salvation.

Greek πιστις/πιστεως "faith" is noun of a verb meaning "to place confidence in, to trust"<sup>3</sup>; Hebrews 11:1 describes "faith" as "an assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of unseen realities" (NBV). Faith is simply a disposition, but it is much more than a meaningless assent to truths. Per Romans 1:5, biblical faith has an "obedience of faith"<sup>4</sup> within it. Such a "conviction" about Gospel truths is adequate to save Christians. Romans 1:17 has "how God makes people right with himself – that it begins and ends with faith" (NCV).

Biblical faith must include repentance. Mark 1:15 has "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (KJV); such faith will involve repentance from living wrongly.<sup>5n</sup> Luke 24:47b says "repentance |para = in-order-for| remission of sins should be preached" (ASV|RVA and translated|ASV). Acts 3:19 has "Arrependei-vos, pois, e convertei-vos para |serem cancelados os vuestros pecados" (ARC|ARA) = "You-people-must-repent-you, therefore, and you-people-must-convert-you in-order-for they-will-be canceled the your sins." "Repent" = "change your hearts" (PEB) = "turn from your sins" (NLT 1996); when we truly believe Jesus is Lord, obedience to Him against sin means repentance. *Biblical faith includes repentance and obedience.*

Biblical faith must include reliance. In John 6:68 a disciple told Jesus Christ why they followed Him: "thou hast the words of eternal life" (ASV). Salvation is not without Christ, per Acts 4:12 "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (ASV).<sup>6n</sup> Romans 10:13 has "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (ESV).<sup>7n</sup> Salvation relies on Jesus Christ, and we must rely on Him for salvation. At John 3:16-8 Jesus Christ said of Himself:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to [condemn] the world; but that the world should be saved through him. [Whoever] believeth on him is not [condemned]; he that believeth not hath been [condemned] already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" [ASV with [TNIV]]."

Repeat: "whoever believeth on him is not condemned." Peter preached of Jesus Christ at Acts 10:43 "every one that believeth on him |receives| remission of sins" (ASV|ESV|ASV). Scripture makes clear that biblical faith on Jesus Christ secures salvation and eliminates any possibility of condemnation.

<sup>1</sup> ESV|A. Campbell et al, *Living Oracles*, page 290.

<sup>2</sup> In Hodges, Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, page 582.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 61 NT.

<sup>4</sup> Pointed out in Sproul, *Reformation Study Bible*, page 1766.

<sup>6</sup> In Hodges, Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, page 582.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 1:15 shows that sometimes, biblical faith can sprout out from repentance.

<sup>6</sup> There is debate among Christians about possibility for non-Christians to be saved. If there is, it cannot be without involvement of Jesus Christ. Both sides of this dispute have people who allege that any possibility of salvation for non-Christians eliminates merit to evangelism and missionary efforts. This is not true. Jesus Christ said at Matthew 28:19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples" (NBV). Whether or not Christ provides salvation among non-Christians is irrelevant to this.

<sup>7</sup> It is not necessary for believers to have a good grasp about how salvation works. Jesus Christ takes care of it.

Another component of biblical faith is discipleship to Christ.<sup>1n</sup> When people truly believe that Christ is Lord, they become obedient to Him and follow His precepts. Romans 6:17 has "ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching" (ASV) - "from the heart." Acts 6:7 has "the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (ESV). Priests among the "disciples" were "obedient to the faith" in Christ. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> A Christian is 'one who follows Christ's teachings.' To believe on Jesus Christ, we must meaningfully agree that His prescribed ways are right and should be adopted to follow.

We conclude, from this brief introductory study, that the basis of salvation is Jesus Christ, with His death and resurrection. The "gospel" (ASV) = "Good News" (NCV) is the account of what JESUS CHRIST did for us to secure salvation for us sin-infested mortals.<sup>4n</sup> Salvation is a gift granted by God in grace to mortals despite their doings, and grace covers Christians' imperfections in living out biblical faith toward Christ. Salvation is a gift accepted by biblical faith. *Biblical faith includes within it reliance, repentance, obedience, and discipleship.*

What Scripturally-Approved Faith Is NOT: 1) agreement with a religious group's institution-centered tenets, 2) mere assent to truths of the Gospel, 3) mere outward compliance, 4) faith-motivated works.
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There is no biblical faith without a humble appeal to Jesus Christ and a commitment to live as He taught.
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### What Follows from Our Salvation

Acts 26:20 has "repent and turn to God and do works consistent with repentance" (NBV). Galatians 5:6 has "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, | but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). Normally, biblical faith shows by works.

Faith is not just a momentary decision, but a way of life.<sup>5</sup> It motivates us to live in ways that are different from the ways of this world.<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:17 has "the righteous shall live by faith" (ASV). Biblical faith should motivate a Christian to live righteously.

Romans 4:5 says "And to the one | who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."<sup>7</sup> However, James 2:18 has "I will show you my faith by my works" (NASB) and James 2:24 explains that "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (ESV). This is like Jesus' saying in Matthew 11:19 "wisdom is justified by her works" (ASV). Wisdom was already good and right, as seen in Proverbs, but it is shown to be thus by its results. Likewise, Christians justify their claims to be believers by what they do.

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<sup>1</sup> We must not mistake assent to religious group tenets for biblical faith. Gnostic non-Christians viewing themselves as Christians in the New Testament era were opposed in 1 John and 2 John. Gnostic groups viewed salvation to be by some self-knowledge,\* about which Jesus was sent to teach,\*\* or in some cases Christ, and was thereby "Savior."

There is a warning to modern churchgoers. Gnostics thought their beliefs centered on themselves were most important in relation to the Divine -- so much they were not Christians. Churchgoers can do similar toward precepts centered on themselves as groups. We must meaningfully accept our duty to follow Jesus Christ.

\* Funk, Hoover, et al, The Five Gospels, page 500.

\*\* Clifton, Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics, page 50.

<sup>2</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>4</sup> **The Gospel is NOT any prescription for a human role in salvation.** Any 'plan of salvation' involving human response and the ideal conversion experience are only related to the Gospel.

<sup>5</sup> Pointed out in The Orthodox Study Bible, page 1529.

<sup>6</sup> In Green, Willimon, The Wesley Study Bible, page 1500.

<sup>7</sup> ESV|A. Campbell et al, Living Oracles, page 290.

Biblical faith is a disposition that motivates works. Jesus Christ said at Luke 6:46 "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (ASV); to show we truly believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, we should do daily as He taught. Jesus Christ taught a plethora of things we can do to please Him. Ideally, these two specific works<sup>1n</sup> should be **among** works that biblical faith motivates:

1. Confession. Romans 10:9 says "That if you might confess in| your mouth Jesus as Lord, and |might trust| in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"<sup>2</sup> and 10:10 "And we |in mouth| say what we believe, and so we are saved."<sup>3</sup> Ancient people often saw confession as belief/sentiment. Paul reflected this at Acts 23:8 "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees |confess| them all" (NASB|ASV|NASB); here "confess" meant 'believe' matching a custom.
2. Getting oneself water baptism. Acts 2:38 has "You-people-must-repent-you| - |and so| let-s/he-get-self-baptized each one of you| in the name of Jesus Christ - | in order to the remission of |you-people's sins."<sup>4</sup> The group was told to repent for remission of their collective sins,<sup>5n</sup> and each individual was obligated by repentance to submit to baptism.<sup>6n</sup> Ancient Jews saw convert baptism as showing entrance to a new life<sup>7</sup> and 'washing away' of prior life to match earlier conversion,<sup>8</sup> so these Jews would have deduced need to first convert to following Christ, their due repentance per 2:36.<sup>9n</sup> 1 Peter 3:20-1 has "water: which also after a |figure| doth now save you, even baptism,| not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a |clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (ASV|BishB|ASV|NASB|RSV 1952) - not the bath,<sup>10n</sup> but the repentance-driven "appeal to God for a clear conscience"<sup>11n</sup> that baptism represents. The "water" of baptism provides a "likeness" to "the resurrection of Jesus Christ" as we go under water and come back up. Romans 6:5 describes water baptism as being "na semelhança da" (ARA) = "in-the-similarity-of-the" Christ's death and resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection are what save us.

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<sup>1</sup> Some Christians add speaking in tongues to this list, but tongues were never universal among Christians. Here is the relevant passage: 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all gifts of healings? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" (ASV).

Not every Christian was an apostle. James 3:1 says "Be not many of you teachers" (ASV), so not every Christian was a teacher. Likewise, not every Christian spoke in tongues, so speaking in tongues was/is not a distinguishing sign of salvation.

<sup>2</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 576| NASB | McReynolds, *ibid.*| NASB, NBV.

<sup>3</sup> ICB | McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 576 | ICB.

<sup>4</sup> For sources, see lengthy source note over this passage on the first page of *Part 4*.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike English, many languages are not word order-oriented. This is true of Greek. The Greek verb tenses between the two directives vary in force, with that beneath "repent" being stronger\*; the Greek links repentance to the remission of sins.\* Also, four of the five pre-500 C.E. Greek manuscripts have equivalent for "your."\*\*

\* In Zodiates, Complete WordStudy New Testament, page 397.

\*\* Metzger, Textual Commentary, page 301.

<sup>6</sup> A natural understanding of "Arrependei-vos, e cada um de vós seja batizado em nome de Jesus Cristo, para remissão de vossos pecados" (VRA).\* Verb forms show this to be a reference to Luke 24:47 "repentance for |remission of sins" (NASB|KJV), as does the plural-singular contrast of the "repentance" and "remission" clauses versus the middle.

English word-by-word of the VRA does a grievous injustice to the VRA's Portuguese grammar here: "You-must-repent-yourself, and each one of you let-s/he-be baptized in name of Jesus Christ, in-order-for remission of you-people's sins."

Portuguese is not a heavily word order-oriented language, but often uses varying forms of words to communicate meaning, so word-by-word English translation here does not accurately communicate what the Portuguese says; it is the same for the Greek here.

For more information, see second topic of *Part4/New Testament...Baptism in Water*.

<sup>7</sup> E. J. Bicknell article in Gore, et al, A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, *New Testament* page 335.

<sup>8</sup> So That's Why! Bible, page 1287.

<sup>9</sup> A likely reason why no narrated sermons to Gentiles tie baptism to salvation's causes. Gentiles would have been unfamiliar with how conversion baptism represents truths.

<sup>10</sup> It is clear that Peter did not want to be misunderstood as denying the teaching of Ephesians 2:8-10. Peter was clear that the actual water bath of baptism does not save anyone. Rather, he was using figurative language: "likeness."

<sup>11</sup> Match: Romans 10:13b "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (ESV).

Both confession and getting baptism<sup>1n</sup> should be specifics within a general pattern of life. James 2:26 says "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (TNIV). 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). Titus 2:14b says that Christ's people should be "zealous of good works" (ASV). Philippians 2:12b says "ocupaos en vuestra salvación" (RVR 1909/1960/1995, RVA) = "You-busy-you in your salvation." The Bible is clear that *REAL genuine faith in the Gospel will motivate us to live our lives doing as Jesus Christ prescribed for us.*

**'Credentials':** Many people cite other 'credentials' in claims to be Christians. Unless we live according to Jesus Christ's teachings documented throughout the New Testament, any other alleged 'credentials' mean nothing.

<sup>1</sup> While popular, we cannot consider either of the two additions to Mark 16:8; modern translations note their highly probable inauthenticity, which the following testify to:

- 300's C.E. widely-traveled church authors Jerome and Eusebius indicate that nearly all the manuscripts they knew of lacked any such text.\*
- The two oldest manuscripts with Mark 16:8 and Luke have neither addition. These date to the 300's. One leaves a gap big enough for the longer embellishment<sup>†</sup> in case someone wanted to add it later, but the exclusion of actual text testifies that the yet older manuscript being copied did not have this text.
- The Sinaitic Old Syriac translation manuscript of c.399/400<sup>††</sup> has no such text.\*
- The Armenian translation was made either in the late 300's or early 400's,<sup>†††</sup> and approximately 100 of those manuscripts have no such text.\*
- The Georgian translation, from south of Russia, was made before 440.<sup>†††</sup> Its two oldest manuscripts have no such text.\*
- An alternative shorter ending of just a few lines appears in four Greek manuscripts of the 600's, 700's, and 800's alongside the traditional embellishment.\* The inclusion of both endings shows uncertainty between them.
- The existence of a competing ending shows that Mark 16:8 was the original end.
- Several manuscripts of Coptic translations\* and many manuscripts of the Ethiopic translation also have the alternative shorter ending alongside the traditional embellishment.\* The translations originate from the 200's<sup>†††</sup> and 300's<sup>†††</sup> respectively. The inclusion of both endings shows uncertainty between them.
- A c.399/400 manuscript of the Old Latin version,\*\* which preceded the Latin Vulgate, has a translation of this alternative shorter ending instead of the longer traditional embellishment.\*\*\* It is the only textual witness to do so.\*
- The earliest church allusions to either embellishment is by Irenaeus and in the Diatessaron from the LATE 100's.\* Earlier church writings outside of Scripture allude to the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus in the New Testament gospels -- but there are no allusions to embellishments after Mark 16:8.
- The overwhelming absence of additional embellishments after Mark 16:8 in ancient times was so deep it influenced centuries beyond; there is an 1100's manuscript that lacked such embellishment,\* and many manuscripts with an embellishment have notes from the scribes reporting older manuscripts without the embellishment.\*

Whether or not either embellishment is 'not contrary' to Scripture is not relevant, nor is 'liking it.' If neither embellishment was in Mark when God finished writing it for publication to the world, **it is not Scripture, and cannot be treated as Scripture.**

**Treating words of mere mortals as God's Word is wrong and risks problems.** Some like to use part of one sentence in the longer embellishment against Ephesians 2:8-10 to teach 'salvation by completed baptism,' but the rest of that sentence fits John 3:18 "Whoever| believeth on him is not condemned" (TNIV|KJV) and harmonizes with Ephesians 2:8-10. TREATING THIS EMBELLISHMENT AS GENUINE IS VERY DANGEROUS, BECAUSE PART OF THAT EMBELLISHMENT HAS CAUSED PEOPLE TO HANDLE UNTRAINED VENOMOUS SNAKES -- AND GET BIT.

\* Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, pages 122-4.

† in Green, Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, page viii.

†† Nestle, Aland, et al, Novum Testamentum Graece, page 66\*.

††† H. Miller, General Biblical Introduction, page 25, 250, 252.

\*\* Comfort, Essential Guide to Bible Versions, page 280.

\*\*\* Aland, Aland, The Text of the New Testament, page 292.



However, it is important to note the order specified in Ephesians 2:8-10 "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 ordained that we should walk in them" (ESV|GenB|ICB|KJV). We are saved "through faith" without "works," and then from that salvation, plural "works" follow.<sup>1n</sup>

### The Relationship of Works to Salvation

We have noted two specific response works to biblical faith: confession and getting baptism. However, human doings are the problem, and so cannot save us. At John 3:3-6 note the sequence:

- John 3:3b "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (NASB)
- John 3:5b "unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (NASB)
- John 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (NASB).

Jesus taught necessity of two births at John 3:5.<sup>2n</sup> Ancient Hebrews used such words as "water" and "drop" to describe natural birth.<sup>3</sup> Jesus meant 'unless one is born naturally and then spiritually, s/he cannot enter the kingdom of God' -- a person must be born of the Spirit. We go to Romans 8:2b-8

"through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in human flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 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|CB).

*Note that while in the sinful self we CANNOT please God.* Continuing on, at Romans 8:9a we have "But you are not ruled by your sinful selves. You are ruled by the Spirit" (ICB) and at Romans 8:10b "But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness" (TNIV). This means that *without the rebirth through the Holy Spirit, nothing we do will please God.* We cannot please God without rebirth and regeneration.

Continuing this thought, we turn to Titus 3:5 and combine that with Ephesians 1. Titus 3:5 says "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing |of the Holy Spirit" (NASB | ASV).<sup>4n</sup> We turn to Ephesians 1:13 which says "In whom, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed in Him, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (NASB alternate) and 1:14a continues "He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession" (HCSB). The word translated "listening" is ακουοντες a form of the word ακουω<sup>5</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> "Works": do not add 'of the Judaic Law'; Gentiles are free from it per Acts 21:24-5. "Works": do not add 'of merit'; Christ's servants have no boast toward Him -- Luke 17:10. "Works": do not add 'other than those of God'; this would mean we are saved 'unto works other than those of God.' The word "works" at Ephesians 2:8-10 is simply that.

<sup>2</sup> Many people see 'baptism' where it is not. This is one place. Hebrews 10:20-22 is an oft-misunderstood reference to priestly consecrations to approach God at Leviticus 16:3-4\* and Numbers 8:5-9. Ephesians 5:25-7 also gets misunderstood; it refers to an ancient custom of pre-nuptial ceremonial baths to prepare for marriage.<sup>†</sup>

\* in Radmacher, Nelson Study Bible, page 2093.

† Life Application Bible, page 2140.

<sup>3</sup> In Hayford, Spirit-Filled Life Bible, page 1577.

<sup>4</sup> This is a reference by Paul to what is described in Acts 10:34-48,+11:4-17,+15:8-9. There, Peter was preaching the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit came down on the audience when they "listened to the message" (NEV) -- Acts 10:43-4. Peter described this coming of the Holy Spirit with "cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV) -- Acts 15:9.

<sup>5</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, pages 583 and Greek Dictionary 4.

means "hearken, listen to," "heed, obey," "take in or admit to mental acceptance"<sup>1</sup> and regarding discipleship "follow, obey."<sup>2</sup> When we make the decision to heed the Gospel and to follow it, immediately the Holy Spirit is given to us. At Titus 3:5, this regenerates us. In John 3:3-6 and Romans 8:2-10, this gives us new birth and potential to please God. There is no pre-regeneration righteousness; *only AFTER regeneration can we do anything that would please God.*

Romans 10:16-7 says "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So | faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (ESV|TNIV). To 'obey the Gospel' is to believe it. Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as "an assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of unseen realities" (NBV). Faith is a disposition of strongly believing things not observed, but faith can be shown.

Confession is a prescribed response to the Gospel just like getting baptism. Romans 10:9 says "That if you might confess in | your mouth Jesus as Lord, and | might trust | in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" <sup>3</sup> and 10:10b says "And we | in mouth | say what we believe, and so we are saved."<sup>4</sup> Greek translated "confess" means "speak the same thing," "assent, accord, agree with."<sup>5</sup> Acts 23:8 has "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees | confess | them all" (NASB|ASV|NASB); "confess" meant 'believe.' At Romans 10:10, believing what is confessed means we have the faith to save us - confessing shows it.

Intelligible oral confession<sup>6n</sup> of the Lord Jesus is impossible underwater by natural means; baptism must be done separately. Which first? At Acts 10:46 new converts were "exalting God" (NASB) and so were baptized at 10:48. Acts 2:41a says of Peter's first sermon "They then that received his word were baptized" (ASV). Regarding a sermon of Philip "when they believed Philip preaching | the gospel | concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized"<sup>7</sup> per Acts 8:12. Confession is a good way to know who believes, and whom to baptize, so confessing Who Jesus is likely preceded baptism. Now, if one stays unregenerate until after baptism is finished, then per Romans 8:2-8 the confession would not please God for Him to grant 'credit' - therefore, there cannot be multiple steps in regeneration. John 6:28-9 has "The people asked Jesus, 'What are the works God wants us to do?' Jesus answered 'The work God wants you to do is this: to believe | on him whom he hath sent" (ICB|ASV emphases mine); they sought plural "works" and Jesus corrected that. Romans 1:17 has "how God makes people right with himself - that it begins and ends with faith" (NCV) - one step. The faith motivating baptism and confession must regenerate us beforehand.

Ephesians 2:8-10 specifies "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).<sup>8n</sup> Baptism and confession of Lord Jesus are certainly works "God hath before ordained" (KJV), which follow salvation via faith and "not of works" (ASV).

<sup>1</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 113.

<sup>2</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 40.

<sup>3</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 576| NASB | McReynolds, *ibid.*| NASB, NBV.

<sup>4</sup> ICB | McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 576 | ICB.

<sup>5</sup> In Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 120 NT.

<sup>6</sup> There is no passage that teaches that a failure to give oral confession guarantees no salvation, as is the case for water baptism. People unable to speak are a recurrent concern in the gospels; they were not extremely rare. Revelation 22:17 says "whoever wishes" (ICB) could partake of eternal life -- this must include those unable to speak. Hence, completed confession is not vital to salvation any more than is completed baptism. Salvation is about a person's attitude toward the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> ASV|RVR 1909/1960/1995, RVA "el evangelio" translated|ASV.

<sup>8</sup> Some people have thought of salvation as a transaction.\* Granting of salvation by God is a δωρον "gift" -- not a transaction; Mark 8:37 refers to transactions via ανταλλαγμα "exchange" (KJV, ASV, others) which is a different word. Salvation is not 'do these steps to get this,' but rather is simple reception of a gift.

\*Ronald E. Osborn article in Lawrence, Classic Themes of Disciples Theology, page 147.

### Salvation: God's Preference

Many think that God's 'default' is to not save sinners. In fact, many are quite uncomfortable with the concept that God genuinely desires to save people. However, Scripture shows that God was very willing to go to very great expenditure to save us – and did so.

First, let us remember that per Romans 5:10b "while we were God's enemies, |we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (ICB|NBV). Christians were at one time an enemy of God. Therefore, what Christ did for our salvation is all the more remarkable, because God did this for His enemies. If He had preferred to condemn us, He would have done nothing.

✠ Luke 24:46-7 says: "and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; repentance |para = in-order-for| remission of sins should be preached in| His name" (ASV|RVA and translated|ASV|NBV).

✠ 1 Timothy 2:3b-6a describes: "God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all people" (TNIV).

✠ John 3:16-8 says of Jesus Christ: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to |condemn| the world; but that the world should be saved through him. |Whoever| believeth on him is not |condemned|; he that believeth not hath been |condemned| already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (ASV with |TNIV|).

The truth is that Jesus Christ suffered greatly to secure "remission of sins."<sup>1n</sup> He came for that purpose; He was sent here not "to condemn the world; but that the world should be saved through him." The last passage clarifies the other end: "Whoever believeth on him is not condemned."<sup>2n</sup>

Titus 2:14 says that Jesus Christ died "to| redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works" (ESV|ASV). People redeemed by Jesus Christ should be "zealous" to do the things Jesus Christ called us to do. Paul directed Christians at Ephesians 4:2 to "Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love" (NLT 1996 emphasis mine). This means that Christians are not going to be faultless even when zealous to do what pleases God.

John 3:16-8 says Jesus Christ did not come "to condemn the world; but that the world should be saved through him." It also says "Whoever believes on him is not condemned." Therefore, when there is failure to do everything properly due to unfortunate circumstances or mistake, *the 'default setting' is that this believer/follower of Jesus Christ = Christian will be saved.*<sup>3n</sup> If we mortals perceive potential uncertainty, we should assume that the believer/follower<sup>4n</sup> of Jesus Christ is saved.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of this enormous expenditure on God's part, God's wrath against people who reject what Jesus Christ did for them will be worsened. God's justice requires sin to be punished, and because they reject what Jesus Christ suffered on their behalf, they will have to endure the punishment themselves. In addition, they will also be guilty of despising this enormous sacrifice and provision of God.

JESUS CHRIST DID NOT DIE FOR NOTHING. Let no one go on like He did. Let mortals not:

1) refuse to accept His sacrifice for us and refuse to receive it by submitting to live under His Lordship, or

2) carry on as if condemnation is His 'default' and preference.

Both of these things are wrong to do.

<sup>2</sup> This is paralleled at Acts 10:43 "everyone that believeth on him |receives| remission of sins" (ASV|ESV|ASV). There are works linked to the cause of salvation in various settings, but Scripture never states that failure to do those works results in condemnation. John 3:16-8 does universally state how one is "not condemned."

<sup>3</sup> **We should oppose any teaching of the contrary that can cause worry about deceased believers/followers of Christ.** Acts 5:14 examples how "believers" were "added to the Lord" (ASV). Acts 10:43b says "everyone that believeth on him |receives| remission of sins" (ASV|ESV|ASV).

<sup>4</sup> Scripture uses "believers" synonymous with "Christians/disciples." Scripture does NOT use 'confessors' or 'the baptized' or 'speakers in tongues' in the same way.

### The Nature of the New Covenant and of Conversion under It

At the start of the Old Testament, there are five books of the Bible written by God through Moses. Four of them are mostly giving a detailed worship code for the Jews. The New Testament, despite being roughly one-third the length of the Old Testament, has not a single similar book.

What made one a Jew? Answer: circumcision. Scripture examples abound. One instance is at Galatians 2:9b "that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision" (ASV). Whether one was circumcised or not was what distinguished a Jew from being a Gentile = non-Jew.

Ancient Jewish records agree. The Talmud at *Yebamoth* 47 a-b has potential male converts being given explanations of the significance of converting to Judaism. If he accepted: "he is circumcised forthwith"<sup>1</sup> and then an additional conversion ritual is described

"As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for [him to be baptized], when two learned men must stand by his side to acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and some of the major ones. When he comes up after his [baptism], he is deemed as an Israelite in all respects."<sup>2</sup>

This was an immersion ceremony just as Christianity has – a conversion baptism.<sup>3n</sup> Jewish conversion baptism accompanied prior conversion and was viewed as the making of a new person by 'washing away' prior life<sup>4</sup> and representing entrance to a new life.<sup>5</sup> Galatians 5:3 says of Judaism "every person who gets circumcised is obligated to observe the entire Law" (NBV), so one was a Jew at circumcision, but convert baptism<sup>6n</sup> was when people viewed a new Jew's conversion as complete.<sup>7n</sup>

Despite detailed worship precepts of the Judaic Law, God was looking forward to something different. In the Old Covenant era, God said Hosea 6:6a "I desire loving-kindness, and not sacrifice" (NBV) which Jesus quoted at both Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. God valued "loving-kindness" more than He valued the sacrifices prescribed in the Judaic Law. Hebrews 10:16 states that God was anticipating Christians in Jeremiah 31: "I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (NKJV).

Jesus noted imminence of this change when a Samaritan said to Him at John 4:20 "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain. But you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where people must worship" (ICB). At John 4:21 Jesus said "The time is coming when you will not have to be in Jerusalem or on this mountain to worship the Father" (ICB) and at 4:23 "The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (ICB). Worship was no longer to be ritualized ceremonies – it was to be from the heart and have a larger meaning, such as at Hosea 6:6a.

A New Covenant was on its way. At Luke 22:50 Jesus said "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (ASV). Starting at Hebrews 7:22b "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant" (NASB) the passage continues to Hebrews 8:6-7: "But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second" (ASV).<sup>8n</sup> The New Testament has among Judaism and Christianity only two covenants: an Old Covenant and a "second covenant" = "new covenant" based on the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Slotki, The Soncino Talmud: Yebamoth.

<sup>2</sup> Slotki, The Soncino Talmud: Yebamoth with |Sandmel, Judaism and Christian Beginnings, page 233|.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that baptism was for converts to Judaism gave 'shock value' to John's baptism: John called Jews to be baptized just like their converts! This would also have been a potential for objections to Gentiles being baptized at Acts 10:47-8.

<sup>4</sup> So That's Why! Bible, page 1287.

<sup>5</sup> E. J. Bicknell article in Gore, et al, A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, New Testament page 335.

<sup>6</sup> Modern Judaism has a ceremonial washing and it is before circumcision\* instead.

\* Renard, The Handy Religion Answer Book, page 102.

<sup>7</sup> One could be a Jew without being fully acknowledged as one. Christians are not authorized to replicate such a class system, and Colossians 3:10-11 principles against such a thing among us, because among us "Christ is all and in all" (KJV, ASV).

<sup>8</sup> One flaw: Romans 3:27 on salvation "by what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith" (NASB emphasis mine). **No** law of works is able to make us righteous.

At John 19:30 we have "when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (NASB). At Matthew 27:50-1 we read "when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom" (TNIV). The temple curtain separated the rest of the temple from the innermost part, which had the presence of God and could only be entered by one certain priest on stringent conditions. When that temple curtain tore, it marked the end of the Old Covenant; God ripped that barrier apart Himself from Heaven's direction down the moment Christ died while shedding blood. The Old Covenant was over; God had finished replacing it for the New Covenant.

This did not mean banning the Judaic Law. This did become an issue when Gentiles started becoming Christians. At Acts 15:1-2 some Jewish church people "began teaching the non-Jewish believers: 'You cannot be saved if you are not circumcised as Moses taught us'" (NCV). This prompted the Jerusalem Council, and at 15:5 "some of the believers who belonged to the Pharisee group came forward and said, 'The non-Jewish believers must be circumcised. They must be told to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV). Per 15:24, this "troubled" (ASV) Gentile Christians. The "law of Moses" was the Judaic Law, the stringent Old Covenant worship code. The first part of Acts 15 describes the Jerusalem council which addressed Gentile Christians and the Judaic Law. 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). Jewish-Christians continued to follow the Law of Moses. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "'Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24. Hence, Jewish Christians would continue to live according to the Judaic Law, but Gentile Christians were not required to do so. Tellingly, no parallel worship code resembling the Judaic Law was ever 'en-Scriptured' for them.

What sort of New Covenant worship was expected? Let us note a hint of Jesus before it was instituted. At John 4:21 He said "Believe me, woman. The time is coming when you will not have to be in Jerusalem or on this mountain to worship the Father" (ICB), and at 4:23 "The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (ICB). John 3:16-8 says of Jesus:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to [condemn] the world; but that the world should be saved through him. [Whoever] believeth on him is not [condemned]; he that believeth not hath been [condemned] already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" [ASV with [TNIV]].

Christ came so that believers on Him can be assured salvation. John 6:28-9 says "The people asked Jesus, 'What are the works God wants us to do?' Jesus answered 'The work God wants you to do is this: to believe |on him whom he hath sent' (ICB|ASV). When these people asked for a plurality of "works" to "do," Jesus had just one -- belief on Him. This is not some meaningless assent: it means to *genuinely* believe what Christ said about Himself in a way that affects our lives according to it.

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 rendered "followers" in the ICB at Acts 11:26. The Greek word μαθητας is plural for a Greek word meaning "one who follows one's teachings"<sup>1</sup> meaning a Christian is 'one who follows Christ's teachings.'<sup>2n</sup> Therefore, the most basic Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian" is simply a "follower" 'of Christ's teachings.'

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>2</sup> Many wish this meant other things than just this, such as agreement with group tenets. Nonetheless, despite however much many hate it, "Christian" just means this.

Used synonymously with "Christians" is "believers." 1 Thessalonians 1:7 commended the congregation of Christians at Thessalonica "so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (NASB). Acts 10:45 says "All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also" (NASB). Hence to be a follower of Christ is to be a believer, and to be a believer is to be a follower.

Acts 10:43b says of Jesus Christ "through his name every one that believeth on him | receives | remission of sins" (ASV|ESV|ASV). This matches what Jesus said of Himself at John 3:18 "Whoever | believeth on him is not condemned" (TNIV|KJV). To "believe on" Jesus Christ is to be a follower of His teachings, and to "believe on" Jesus Christ makes one a saved Christian.

Unlike Judaic conversion baptisms, the baptism to close the conversion practice from the Heavenly perspective is done *instantly*. Per Mark 1:7-8, John the Baptist "preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you | in the Holy Spirit'" (ESV | ASV). Jesus Christ would actually be involved with baptizing in both – but would only do the latter Personally. John 3:22-3 says "After these things, Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized" (NASB). John 4:1 says "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (NASB) and clarifies "although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were" (NASB). After the New Covenant began, nowhere in Scripture is Jesus portrayed baptizing Christians in water; mortals are attributed the responsibility of baptizing in water throughout the New Testament. In the present New Covenant system, Christians baptize in water, while Jesus Himself does not. Jesus Christ baptizes in the Holy Spirit, as anticipated at Mark 1:7-8. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (ASV). The effects of one incident of this are described: "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized | in the Holy Spirit'" (ESV | ASV) at Acts 11:16, and at Acts 15:8-9 "And God, who knoweth the heart, | gave them evidence |, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV|NBV|ASV).<sup>1n</sup> When God detects biblical faith in the heart, He acts accordingly, baptizing "in the Holy Spirit" and therewith "cleansing their hearts by faith." All Christians are baptized "in one Spirit," the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ does that, as anticipated at Mark 1:7-8.

Subsequent to becoming believers/Christians, Scripture ordains water baptism to close the conversion experience, just as ancient Jews required conversion water baptism to do the same.<sup>2n</sup> Jesus said at Matthew 28:19-20a "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NASB|NCV). Greek rendered "baptize" means "completely submerge,"<sup>3</sup> so we are to "completely submerge" people who are "disciples"/believers/Christians. Ancient Jewish conversion baptisms were viewed as showing a 'washing away' of earlier life and symbolically making new people<sup>4</sup> and representing entrance into a new life.<sup>5</sup> In Judaism, as we already saw, circumcision made one a Jew, but water baptism was required to have the conversion experience viewed as complete.

Christianity paralleled this, but biblical faith in Jesus Christ replaced circumcision. This is seen most clearly in two passages, both of which are in books where Paul was refuting the need for observance of Judaic Law practices for salvation. Colossians 2:11-13 says

<sup>1</sup> The event being recalled was narrated at Acts 10:34-48. After this Holy Spirit baptism in Acts 10:43-5, Peter subsequently ordered water baptism in Acts 10:48.

<sup>2</sup> Converted Gentiles immersed themselves -- Chronological Study Bible, page 1099.

<sup>3</sup> Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 191.

<sup>4</sup> So That's Why! Bible, page 1287.

<sup>5</sup> E. J. Bicknell article in Gore, et al, A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, New Testament page 335.

"and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the | poder = power| of God who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the| lack of physical circumcision,...."<sup>1</sup>

The "circumcision made without hands" is Christ, our circumcision. Romans 6:5 describes water baptism as being in "na semelhança da sua morte" (ARA) = "in-the similarity of-the his death" for how it parallels being buried as dead and then resurrecting new. Colossians 2:11-13 shows itself to be a picture lesson; we have never really removed our flesh, but Christians have disavowed living to the flesh's sinful urges. 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 calls Christ's resurrection as a "most important" (ICB) truth of the saving Gospel; when we have "faith in the power of God" to save us through Christ and His resurrection, we get "circumcision made without hands." Just like in ancient conversions to Judaism, there should be a water baptism to 'wash away' prior life, but in our case to accompany "circumcision without hands" by biblical faith in Christ, and also to show our similarity to Christ as His followers.

In Galatians, Paul confronts a situation where Gentile Christians were paying too much heed to 'church Jews' telling them they needed to become Jews and follow the Judaic Law to get salvation. 1 Corinthians 10:2 calls the Exodus Israelites "batizados em Moisés" (ARC, AEC) = "baptized in Moses." They took the Judaic Law delivered by Moses for authority about God. Greek εις here and at Galatians 3:27 has for one meaning "in."<sup>2</sup> To correct Galatian misunderstandings, at Galatians 3:24 Paul calls the Judaic Law "child-conductor | vnto Christ" (NASB margin|BishB), then 3:25 "now that faith has come, we are no longer under a |child-conductor" (NASB| margin), 3:26b "ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (ASV), 3:27 "For as many of you as were baptized |em=in| Christ have put on Christ" (KJV|ARA/ARC/AEC/VRA and translated|KJV). In Roman society, a youth who had become an adult put aside childhood clothes for new clothes to commemorate the change.<sup>3</sup> In ancient times, clothing was considered representative of the wearer's self.<sup>4</sup> This passage is a case where knowledge of ancient culture assists right handling of Scripture.<sup>5n</sup> Galatians 3:24-7 teaches 'growing up.' This meant replacing the Judaic Law with biblical faith in Christ for salvation: identify oneself with Christ via baptism in His name, and "put on Christ" in the sense of "putting on" the clothes of an adult, to 'wear' Christ. Hence, again, biblical faith in Christ replaces circumcision to become Jews, and water baptism should follow just as in Judaism to complete the earthly conversion experience.

Now, to recap, upon biblical faith in the Gospel, we become Christians. Unlike Judaism where a baptism to complete the conversion experience had to be subsequent to the circumcision that made a Jew, in Christianity, the baptism to complete the conversion experience from God's perspective is taken care of immediately by Jesus' Holy Spirit baptism. On earth, human beings are to baptize the new believers in water to complete the earthly conversion experience, just as in Judaism.

What of after the conversion experience? At John 4:19-21, Jesus foretold a time with no ritualized/ceremonial worship code, and said at 4:23 "The time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (ICB). Worship no longer centers on procedures - it is to be from the heart and have larger meaning. The Old Covenant had the Judaic Law, which was a worship code spelled out in detail. Tellingly, no parallel worship code to resemble the Judaic Law was ever 'en-Scriptured' for the New Covenant. Why? New Covenant worship is *entirely* different.

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 rendered "followers" in the ICB at Acts 11:26 and is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>6</sup> The Bible

<sup>1</sup> NASB|ARA and translated|NASB|NBV.

<sup>2</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, page *Greek Lexicon* 16.

<sup>3</sup> Life Application Bible, page 2121.

<sup>4</sup> Children's Resource Ministry Bible, page 458.

<sup>5</sup> Similar: Amos 4:6 "cleanness of teeth" (KJV) seems good now, but at that time, it meant lack of food to dirty the teeth with, meaning starvation.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

meaning of the term "Christian" therefore means "follower" of Christ. After conversion, we are to follow Christ's teachings. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus taught profusely over the values His followers should have, and how we should live our regular lives according to God's values. For conscious worship-specific activity, He taught prayer. He also taught the Lord's Supper - notably in Luke 22, in 1 Corinthians 11, and others. At Matthew 28:19-20<sup>1n</sup> Jesus said "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). Please note the "have told you"; what Jesus Christ most values is that His followers = Christians do the things He chronologically had taught *up to that time*.

In New Covenant worship, we follow Christ by living according to His teachings on daily life, and His smattering of teachings in religious life, such as the Lord's Supper, baptism, evangelism and prayer. 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). Romans 6:13 has "use your whole body as a tool to do what is | good" (NLT 1996|NCV). Unlike Old Covenant offerings, New Covenant offerings are our own selves as living people. Our worship as Christians is devoting ourselves to God to do what is good in our whole lives for Him.

Scripture gives information on good worship. Galatians 6:2 refers to "the law of Christ" (ASV), and to follow it here: "Help each other with your troubles" (ICB). James 1:27 agrees to Jewish Christians: "Pure religion and undefiled |in the sight of| our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (ASV|NBV|ASV); Greek translated "religion" literally is "religious service,"<sup>2</sup> so "pure religious service" is to serve people and avoid sin that pervades the world. James 2:8 mentions "the royal law according to Scripture, `You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (ESV). Galatians 5:6 states that "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, |but only| the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). To worship rightly under the New Covenant, we put our biblical faith in Jesus Christ to work by following His teachings doing what is good.

### New Testament Example of Faith – Baptism in Water

#### Water Baptism Essay Division #1 of 2: Early Baptism in Scripture

Ancient Judaism commonly assumed baptisms to accompany any conversion experience.<sup>3</sup> Scripture shows circumcision made a Jew, as in Acts 10:45 and Galatians. The Talmud at *Yebamoth* 47 says after circumcision there was "immediate ablution" after which a convert was "deemed" a Jew.<sup>4</sup> People who had converted to Judaism got baptism to show 'washing away' of earlier life and were seen as new people<sup>5</sup> for this, as conversion baptism represented entrance into a new life.<sup>6</sup> *Such meanings were inherent to the Bible meaning of the Bible term.*<sup>7n</sup>

We have two main records of John the Baptist: Scripture and first-century Jewish historian Josephus. We start with John's baptism of repentance in Scripture. Greek transliterated "baptism" and "baptize" means "completely submerge."<sup>8</sup> In Matthew 3:11, John says "I baptize you with water for repentance" (NASB) and Luke 3:3b reports him "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (NASB). Greek under "for" is εἰς also translatable "because of,"<sup>9</sup> proposing:

<sup>1</sup> Note: on new disciples, He said "baptize them" -- they are already disciples before this. Note: He places this between "make" and "teach," opposing withholding/delaying baptism.

<sup>2</sup> In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

<sup>3</sup> In Stamps, Adams, The Full Life Study Bible New Testament, page 249.

<sup>4</sup> Slotki, The Soncino Talmud: Yebamoth; reference Sandmel, Judaism and Christian Beginnings, page 233.

<sup>5</sup> So That's Why! Bible, page 1287.

<sup>6</sup> E. J. Bicknell article in Gore, et al, A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, New Testament page 335.

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see *Part 4/The Nature of the New Covenant...*

<sup>8</sup> Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 191.

<sup>9</sup> Per Mark 1:4 NKJV margin.



Matthew 3:11a prospective: "As for me, I baptize you with water because-of repentance"

Luke 3:3b prospective: "preaching a baptism of repentance because-of the forgiveness of sins."

People would not likely be baptized if they had not repented, so it is "because of" in Matthew 3:11. William Tyndale's early English translation has "I Baptise you in water in token of repentaunce" (1526). The VRA has "na base do" = "in-the basis of-the" at this verse. However, for the other verse, there was necessity for repentance in order to get "forgiveness of sins" or "remission of sins" (KJV), suggesting "for" in Luke 3:3. We conclude:

Matthew 3:11a "I baptize you with water |in-the basis of-the| you amending to the repentance"<sup>1</sup>

Luke 3:3b "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" [NASB].

Acts 19:4 has "John baptized |amb un baptisme de penediment" (NASB |TBS-Cat) = "with a baptism of penitence." The baptism was on condition of repentance, and the repentance + baptism pair was preached and done with purpose "for the forgiveness of sins." Regarding John preaching on it, the Greek word order has "baptism" before "of repentance" and then "forgiveness of sins" at both Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 as so: "βαπτισμα a baptism μετανοιας of repentance εις in-order-for αφεσιν pardon αμαρτιων of sins"<sup>2</sup> = "a baptism of repentance in-order-for pardon of sins." This baptism was because of "amending to" and showed conversion to "repentance for the remission of sins" (KJV).

Repentance is not changing belief structure; Scripture's emphasis is changing of actions. John preached "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" at Matthew 3:2 (NASB) and "Bring forth therefore fruits |befitting| to amendment of life"<sup>3</sup> at 3:8. Luke 3:10-4 says

"`What should we do then?' the crowd asked. John answered, `Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.' Even tax collectors came to be baptized. `Teacher,' they asked, `what should we do?' `Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, `And what should we do?' He replied, `Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay'" (TNIV).

John's ministry of "baptism of repentance | for the remission of sins" (NASB |KJV) emphasized not baptism, but "amendment of life"<sup>4n</sup> and associated deeds.

The first century Jewish historian Josephus gives us more detail about how this combination worked, as well as giving the answer to the age-old riddle about why the sinless Christ was baptized. Josephus explains at *Antiquities* 18:5:2/18:117 that John the Baptist preached to

"the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice toward their fellows and piety toward God, and so doing, to join in baptism. In his view, this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for what sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body [supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness."<sup>5</sup>

As a messenger of God, John commanded "the Jews" to be baptized as an act of "piety toward God," so Jesus was baptized to "fulfill all righteousness" (NBV) per Matthew 3:15. Jesus Christ later ordained that "repentance for |remission of sins should be preached in his name" (NASB |KJV) at Luke 24:47, which extends the conversion which John's baptism represented and adds Himself to it.

Josephus and the New Testament may seem contradictory. Mark 1:4b and Luke 3:3b say John preached "a baptism of repentance for| the remission of sins" (NASB |KJV), and we must always place the Word of God above all else. However, these are not contradictory. John preached at Matthew 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (NASB) and 3:8 "Bring forth therefore fruits |befitting| to amendment of life."<sup>6</sup> Per 3:6, his practice was "Confessando os seus pecados,

<sup>1</sup> NASB| "na base do" VRA translated | "vous amener á la repentance" LSG translated.

<sup>2</sup> Lacueva, *Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español*, pages 137, 233: "βαπτισμα un baptismo μετανοιας de arrepentimiento εις para αφεσιν perdón αμαρτιων de pecados" translated by me.

<sup>3</sup> KJV 1611 | Scofield, English, *New Scofield Reference Bible*, page 995 | KJV 1611 margin.

<sup>4</sup> On salvation, Scripture talks most on biblical faith, as should every salvation sermon.

<sup>5</sup> Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, 484 | Hadas-Label, *Flavius Josephus*, page 33 | Whiston, *ibid.*; reference Stendahl, *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, page 40.

<sup>6</sup> KJV 1611 | Scofield, English, *New Scofield Reference Bible*, page 995 | KJV 1611 margin.

eram batizados" (AEC) = "Confessing the their sins, they-were baptized." Per Matthew 3:6, John required people to acknowledge their sinfulness and need for repentance, and he preached that people must repent and do deeds fitting this amending of life. Among these deeds was to confirm "piety towards God" by submission to baptism. In baptism "of repentance" (KJV) or "of amendment of life" (GenB), repentance that led one to baptism caused "remission of sins" because they were "thoroughly justified beforehand by righteousness" per Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:5:2.

The baptism did not "put away" sins, because the righteousness of the repentant had already justified the soul. Anyone baptized due to "repentance" showed new submissiveness to God; anyone 'regretful' but refused baptism was not obedient to God and unrepentant. John's baptism, like Jewish baptism, was to show conversion. John practiced and preached a repentance + baptism combination intended "for the forgiveness of sins" with Luke 3:3 "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (NASB) and baptism showing conversion to Matthew 3:8 "amendment of life" (GenB) and identifying with it.

Scripture is silent about Jesus' death nullifying the effect of John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." At Acts 19:1-6 some of John's baptizees are called "disciples" (NASB),<sup>1n</sup> and Paul asked them "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit, having believed?"<sup>2</sup> There is no indication that their salvations were revoked when Jesus died - they were baptized to obtain the Holy Spirit.<sup>3n</sup> At Acts 18:24-28 a baptizee of John was not given Christian baptism. In both cases, the "remission of sins" was due to the repentance that John's baptism was a response to and showed conversion to.

Unlike previous baptisms among Jews, John's baptism was not distinct from Christianity. At Acts 19:4 "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance | saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus'" (TNIV | ASV).

Near the end of John's baptism ministry, Jesus had one too. John 3:22-3 has "Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized" (NASB). 4:1 has "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (NASB) and "although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were" (NASB).

This baptism did not rival John's. John 4:1 indicates that John was still baptizing when Jesus left His baptism ministry. When we recall that Jesus was baptized by John beforehand, and note that in Jewish culture baptism identified conversion,<sup>4</sup> we infer that these two baptisms were the same.

At John 4:1a "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples" (NASB) -- note distinction between 'making disciples' and 'baptizing disciples.' At John 12:47b Jesus says "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (ASV), yet at John 4:2 Jesus' role in this ministry is clarified: "Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were" (NASB). Jesus came to save everyone, yet Himself baptized no one; we infer that in His baptism ministry, baptism was not part of getting people saved.

John 6:28-9 says "The people asked Jesus, 'What are the works God wants us to do?' Jesus answered 'The work God wants you to do is this: to believe | on him whom he hath sent'" (ICB | ASV). Recall that Jesus had been involved in a baptism ministry, but when they asked for a plurality of "works" to "do," Jesus had just one -- belief on Him. Hence, when Jesus said at 6:29 that the singular "work" "believe" and that ONE "work" only is what "God wants" us "to do," this excluded baptism.

The Gospel of John was written to New Covenant Christians so "by believing you may have life in His name" (HCSB) per John 20:31. In New Covenant Gospel salvation, the baptism action is still distinct from salvation by faith itself, but is an obligated follow-up to any genuine biblical faith.

<sup>1</sup> In Acts, generic "disciples" means "Christians"; only people who are already Christians get Christian baptism.

<sup>2</sup> Scofield, English, *The New Scofield Study Bible*, page 1397 emphasis mine.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:9 has "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (ASV). Acts 4:12 teaches that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, so even if John's baptizees were not His direct followers, He got salvation for John's baptizees. Scripture gives no specifics of how, nor do we need to know -- we trust it.

<sup>4</sup> In Stamps, Adams, *The Full Life Study Bible New Testament*, page 249.

*Water Baptism Essay Division #2 of 2: Christian Baptism Both Jew and Gentile*

Christians were to continue such conversion baptism: in Matthew 28:19-20a Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NASB|NCV). In ancient times, a person's name represented not just physical identification but the whole person.<sup>1</sup> Two lessons arise from this. First, Jesus Christ told us to baptize "disciples."<sup>2n</sup> Second, Jesus Christ expects His followers to be baptized in His Name - and all that His Name represents - just as He expects them to obey Him.<sup>3n</sup>

Jesus Christ was to do baptism in the Holy Spirit per Mark 1:7-8,<sup>4n</sup> as John the Baptist taught "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you |in the Holy Spirit" (ESV|ASV). Still, Matthew 28:19-20 shows that Christians were to baptize "disciples." An example is at Acts 10:34-48. About this event, Peter recalled that when tongues were spoken, "I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized | in the Holy Spirit'" (ESV|ASV) per Acts 11:16. These new believers had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, were therefore Christians, and were now fitting recipients of baptism in water. In response to this truth, Peter said "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" and then "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (ASV) per Acts 10:47-8.

We see that Jesus Christ baptizes in the Holy Spirit, and mortals are to baptize Christ's "disciples" in water. At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). The baptism we are commanded to do is to baptize "disciples" in water. Per Acts 11:26, Christians is a rename of "disciples": "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Hence, Matthew 28:19-20a tells us to baptize "Christians"/"disciples" in water.

This means mortal Christians are responsible for administering water baptism. It also means Christians have as much obligation to get baptized as they do to obey Christ's teachings as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> In Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1519.

<sup>2</sup> Per Acts 11:26, "Christians" renamed "disciples." Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge." \* Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ. To be totally right as we follow this, we must acknowledge Christians we baptize to be Christians. Some people think no one is a Christian until after s/he comes up from baptism; this would mean that when s/he is brought under, s/he is 'not a disciple' -- we would not be baptizing "disciples," but non-disciples. We see that "disciples" are "disciples"/Christians before baptism and extensive instruction.

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

<sup>3</sup> It is unrealistic to think that any person who knows fully and rightly of baptism, yet desires and chooses to remain knowingly unbaptized, is a follower of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13a says "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" plus "were all made to drink of one Spirit" (ASV). All Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ does that, as anticipated at Mark 1:7-8.

The statement that "there is...one baptism" (KJV, ASV, others) at Ephesians 4:4-5 gets used to prohibit water baptism,\* or to deny existence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The narration of the event described at Acts 10:34-48,+11:4-17,+15:8-9 shows that Peter knew and accepted both baptisms. The right meaning of "there is...one baptism" should be understood from the culture of ancient initiation rites.

Ephesians 3:3-9 refers to "mystery" (ASV) in Christianity. Mystery religions were about an entity who had overcome death,\*\* as Christ did. The competing ancient popular mystery religion Mithraism had multiple levels of initiation.^\* All involved water and each represented rank† There are not multiple initiation rites assigned to Christians so that we can create a rank system among ourselves; we have only one.

It is sad that any part of Ephesians 3:21-4:6, written to urge Christian mutual acceptance, gets misused in factious activity as grounds to reject Christians based on 'unacceptable' conversion experiences. This use is contrary to its purpose.

\* Dandelion, An Introduction to Quakerism, pages 212-3.

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

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

† E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, pages 276-7.

At Acts 26:18 Paul recalled when Christ told him of his mission to the Gentiles "para que reciban, por la fe que es en mí, remisión de pecados y suerte entre los santificados" (RVR 1909) = "in-order-for that they-might-receive, by the faith that is in me, remission of sins and lot among the sanctified." During Paul's conversion experience at Acts 22:16,<sup>1n</sup> Ananias gave these instructions<sup>2n</sup>:

1. a modern Spanish translation: "Levánte y sé bautizado, y lava tus pecados invocando su nombre" (LBLA) = "Let-you-rise and you-be baptized, and wash your sins invoking His name."
2. the 1560 English Geneva Bible in its 1602 revision: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sinnes, in calling on the Name of the Lord" (GenB).
3. the 1568 English Bishops' Bible: "aryse, & be baptized, & wasshe away thy sinnes, in calling on the name of the Lorde" (BishB).
4. the 1855 edition of the French Version Martin: "Lève-toi, et sois baptisé, et purifié de tes péchés, en invoquant le nom du Seigneur" (VM) = "Raise-you, and let-you-be baptized, and you-purify of your sins, in invoking the name of-the Lord."
5. a modern French translation: "Lève-toi, sois baptisé, et lavé de tes péchés, en invoquant le nom du Seigneur" (NVSFR) = "Raise-you, let-you-be baptized, and wash your sins, in invoking the name of-the Lord."

Acts 22:16b<sup>3n</sup> is literally "Levantandote, bautízate" = "Rising-you, make-you-baptized" then Greek και = "y" = "and," then "sé lavado" = "be washed" or 'make-you-washed'<sup>4</sup>; και translated "and" links two distinct items,<sup>5n</sup> which are two double-directives. The second double-directive was that Paul would 'make washed away' his sins by "calling on the name of the Lord," a reference<sup>6</sup> to Joel 2:32 quoted in Romans 10:13 "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (ASV). Paul knew Jesus Christ to be Lord, but not as Savior; he was to "call on the name of the Lord," appealing to Him to purify him of his sins, and then as a new convert to full faith, was to be baptized.

This passage also tied in ancient Judaic views of what convert baptism meant - part of the *Bible meaning of a Bible term*. Ancient Jewish conversion baptism matched prior conversion and was seen as showing 'washing away' prior life and as symbolically making new people,<sup>7</sup> representing entrance into a new life.<sup>8</sup> Baptism had symbolic meanings which were transferred, adapted and expanded in Christianity.<sup>9n</sup> They are referred to in Scripture, where they support and enhance *larger main points*. Here, a secondary point was that Paul was to show 'washing away' his prior life of sin.

Romans 6:3-5 is part of a passage explaining a picture representation of how Christians are to relate to sin: Romans 6:2b "We are those who have died to sin" (TNIV). This must be a picture because reality is that Christians still face the sin problem per 1 John 1:8-10. Romans 6:2-11 gives a picture of the Christian's viewed relationship to sin, and also explains Colossians 2:11-3. Behold:

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<sup>1</sup> The early 1800's United States saw a unity movement known as the Restoration begin. After it began, some people within it started to teach that salvation depends on completed biblical water baptism -- no exceptions. Despite faith on Jesus Christ as Lord, unbaptized Christians were 'unsaved' and so 'not Christian.' The error lasted.

**Opposing these mistaken inferences is NOT to downplay or denigrate the duty of baptism.** Please recall this document is a Christian unity study. These errors cause some Christians to not be acknowledged. **Given this study's purpose, errors that prevent church unity must be corrected.**

<sup>2</sup> Due to misinterpretation of some Bible passages, many people think completed water baptism is cause of salvation for believers -- not biblical faith. Water baptism was a formal closing 'conversion supplement' of Judaism. The New Covenant shifted away from ceremonial activity and towards faith. It would be inconsistent with this for a ceremonial act that was not primary in Judaism to become so in Christianity.

<sup>3</sup> We have seen Scripture's statements that biblical faith assures salvation. When a baptism passage can be understood multiple ways, the right way/s harmonize with this.

<sup>4</sup> Lacueva, Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español, page 571; Spanish->English translations mine.

<sup>5</sup> Scripture attributes administering of water baptism solely to mortals. If water baptism washes away sin, then the mortal baptizer would be removing sin. However, removal of sins is a role solely the Lord's, so baptism and removing sin are distinct.

<sup>6</sup> Reference from Lacueva, Nuevo Testamento Interlineal Griego-Español, page 571.

<sup>7</sup> So That's Why! Bible, page 1287.

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Bicknell article in Gore, et al, A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, *New Testament* page 335.

<sup>9</sup> It is important not to take references to these symbolic meanings as literal.

Romans 6:3-5

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized |in| Christ Jesus have been baptized |in-the| His death? |Of result that| we have been buried with Him through baptism |in-the| death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united |in-the| likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be |in-the| likeness of His resurrection"<sup>1</sup>

Colossians 2:11-3a

"in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the |poder = power| of God who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the| lack of physical circumcision" (NASB|ARA and translated|NASB|NBV).

Both use the cultural view of conversion baptism making 'new people' by 'washing away' prior life to picture lessons on other themes. Colossians 2:11-3 pictures our flesh removed via "the circumcision of Christ" = "circumcision made **without hands**,"<sup>2n</sup> applied to us by faith in God's power to save us via Christ's resurrection, which per 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 is a "first" truth (ASV) of the Gospel. Romans 6:5 says baptism is "in-the likeness" to Christ's burial and resurrection, like Colossians 2:11-3. Romans 6:6 has figurative "our old self was crucified" (TNIV) in likeness to Christ's death, and 6:11 "Likewise | consider yourselves dead to sin" (KJV | ESV). Colossians 2:11-3 and Romans 6:2-11 show that we imitate Christ's death and new life in baptism; matching cultural views of the era on conversion baptism, we 'wash away' prior life and start life anew with a perspective of being a new person. The points of Romans 6:2-11 and Colossians 2:11-3 are these<sup>3n</sup>: we forsake lives of sin at conversion, and Christ is our circumcision that removed our prior uncleanness = sinful lives.

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ identifies with Him and His authority. 1 Corinthians 10:2 describes the Exodus Israelites as "batizados em Moisés" (ARC, AEC) = "baptized in Moses." They took the Judaic Law delivered by Moses for authority about God. Greek εἰς here and at Galatians 3:27 has for one meaning "in."<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:24 calls the Judaic Law "child-conductor | vnto Christ" (NASB margin|BishB), then 3:25 "now that faith has come, we are no longer under a |child-conductor" (NASB| margin), then 3:26b "ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (ASV), and 3:27 "For as many of you as were baptized |em=in| Christ have put on Christ" (KJV|ARA/ARC/AEC/VRA and translated| KJV). In Roman society, a youth who had become an adult put aside childhood clothes for new clothes to commemorate the change.<sup>5</sup> In ancient times, clothing was seen as representative of the wearer's self.<sup>6</sup> This passage is a case where knowledge of ancient culture assists right handling of Scripture.<sup>7n</sup> Galatians 3:24-7<sup>8n</sup> teaches 'growing up.' They were to replace the "child-conductor" Judaic Law with biblical faith in Christ for salvation, identify oneself with Christ via baptism in His name, "put on Christ" to signify move into spiritual adulthood, and should be 'wearing' the attributes of Christ.

Romans 6:2-11 and Galatians 3:24-7 assume each Christian baptized as they teach. Colossians 2:11-3 parallels ancient Judaism, where circumcision made one a Jew and baptism followed promptly; in Christianity, baptism follows-up faith that makes one a Christian.<sup>9n</sup> It should be just as prompt.

<sup>1</sup> NASB with |"in" = ARA "em" translated, "in-the" = ARA "na" translated, "Of result that" = AEC "De sorte que" translated|.

<sup>2</sup> Some people think this is baptism; water baptism is not administered "without hands."

<sup>3</sup> Sadly, some focus so narrowly on the baptism sub-passages that they miss these points.

<sup>4</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, page *Greek Lexicon* 16.

<sup>5</sup> Life Application Bible, page 2121.

<sup>6</sup> Children's Resource Ministry Bible, page 458.

<sup>7</sup> Similar: Amos 4:6 "cleanness of teeth" (KJV) seems good now, but at that time, it meant a lack of food to dirty the teeth with, meaning starvation.

<sup>8</sup> Per Colossians 1:18, the church is the body of Christ. At Acts 5:14+2:47, it is God who adds people to the Lord. Scripture attributes administering/receiving water baptism solely to mortals, so if water baptism puts persons into Christ, then mortals would take on a role Scripture attributes to God. Such teaching is unauthorized.

<sup>9</sup> **This distinction matters because** evangelism should NOT happen only near water, so conversion should not happen only near water. Not every believer can get baptized right away.

Besides Matthew 28:19-20 discussed to start this essay,<sup>1n</sup> there are two other passages which show that Christians should get themselves baptized in obedience to Christ – a rightly-knowing and willful rejection of baptism is not an option to a genuine follower of Jesus Christ.

One of these is Acts 2:38, specifically part of Peter’s sentence. Acts 2:38b is below:

- “You-people-must-repent-you| – [and so] let-s/he-get-self-baptized each one of you| in the name of Jesus Christ – | in order to the remission of [you-people’s sins.”<sup>2</sup>
- “Arrependei-vos, e cada um de vós seja batizado em nome de Jesus Cristo, para remissão de vossos pecados” (VRA).<sup>3n</sup>
- “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Iesus Christ, for the remission of sinnes” [KJV 1611].<sup>4n</sup>

Greek is not word-order oriented like English. In English, what a clause means is usually seen from the words in it and their order. In some languages, including Greek, this is not so: what a clause means is often seen from the words in it and what forms those words take within it.

Hyphenation of clauses was not used in the early 1600’s; other punctuation was used. With the 1611 King James Version punctuated like it was, and like in printings up to before the 1769 edition of the KJV, it was not inconsistent with the Portuguese translation quoted. The 1611 KJV, using English, does not have the variety of verb forms needed to convey the Greek here with precision.

The Portuguese translation cited is similar to the original 1681 translation of João Ferreira D’Almeida which has at the start “Arrependeivos, e bautizeze cada hum de vosoutros em nome de Jesus Christo, pera” which is quoted up to the equivalent of modern “para.” That second comma is exactly where the second comma was in the KJV before 1769. This translation had “bautizeze” meaning “let-s/he-get-self-baptized.” Unlike English, which has only one verb tense for directives, Portuguese and Spanish have more than one, and more than one is used in the translation here. The 1611 King James Version, using English, was not capable of matching that level of precision.

New Testament Greek also has more than one verb tense for directives. New Testament Greek is so precise that it has multiple ways to say “the” depending upon the circumstances. Two different verb tenses are used in the Greek here; the stronger verb tense being upon the equivalent to KJV “Repent,” and the verb tense beneath KJV “be baptized” does not carry the same force.<sup>5</sup>

The Portuguese translations represent that situation very well: the strong imperative is used for “Arrependeivos” = “Arrependei-vos” = “You-people-must-repent-you” while the obligatory subjunctive is used for “seja batizado” = “let-s/he-be baptized” and “bautizeze” = “let-s/he-get-self-baptized.” The Portuguese VRA, ARA, ARC, AEC have for the two directives this:

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<sup>1</sup> It has been said of baptism that if someone “is fully a Christian without it, why insist on the ordinance, or even practice it?”\* Answer: because Christ said so.

\* Hayden, Fifty Years of Digression and Disturbance, page twelve.

<sup>2</sup> For sources, see lengthy source note over this passage on the first page of *Part 4*.

<sup>3</sup> English word-by-word of the VRA does a grievous injustice to the VRA’s grammar here: “You-must-repent-yourself, and each one of you let-s/he-be baptized in name of Jesus Christ, in-order-for remission of you-people’s sins.”

Portuguese is not a heavily word order-oriented language, but often uses varying forms of words to communicate meaning, so word-by-word English translation here does not accurately communicate what the Portuguese says; it is the same for the Greek here.

<sup>4</sup> Notice a comma present in the 1611 KJV that is not present in contemporary printings of the KJV. That comma was present in editions and printings of the KJV up to 1768. A 1768 printing had for the whole verse “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Iesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Ghost.”

Modern printings of the KJV are of the 1769 edition, which was done by one man named Benjamin Blayney.\* Its handling of this verse has led people to wrongly think the verse negates the rest of Scripture on salvation by biblical faith. Of course, it is better to adopt a translation here that does not conflict with the rest of Scripture.

\* in J. Williams, Shaylor, From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man, page 159-60.

<sup>5</sup> In Zodhiates, Complete WordStudy New Testament, page 397.

"Arrependei-vos, e cada um de vós seja batizado" = "You-people-must-repent-you, and each one of you-people let-s/he-be baptized." In all of these, the strong imperative is used for the directive to repent, and the obligatory subjunctive is used for the directive of baptism.

The same is done for Spanish translations. The 1569 C. de Reyna/Reina Bible had "Hazed penitência, y baptizese" = "You-must-do penitence, and let-s/he-get-self-baptized." The 1602 C. de Valera Bible had "Hazed penitencia, y baptizese" which translates exactly the same. The Reina-Valera Revisiónes of 1862, 1909, 1960, and 1995 all say "Arrepentíos, y bautícese" which translates "You-people-must-repent-you, and let-s/he-get-self-baptized." Like the Portuguese translations quoted, these used the strong imperative for equivalent of KJV "Repent" and the obligatory subjunctive for equivalent of KJV "be baptized" - precisely reflecting the difference in force between Greek verbs.

Ancient Greek is not as based on word order as English is. The Greek of Peter's two directives, when translated precisely, show it is 'Repent for the remission of your sins' with 'get-self-baptized' being obligated by such repentance. The Greek connects repentance and salvation.<sup>1</sup>

This is enhanced by the quantities of each directive. The directive "Repent ye"<sup>2n</sup> (ASV) or "Arrependei-vos" (ARA, ARC, AEC, VRA) or "Arrepentíos" (RVR 1909/1960/1995) is plural. The "for the remission |of your sins" (KJV|ASV)<sup>3n</sup> is plural. The directive "bautícese" (RVR 1909/1960/1995) = "let-s/he-get-self-baptized" is singular. Greek grammar enabled the obligation to get oneself baptized to be made a side directive<sup>4n</sup> inserted within the command to 'repent for the remission of your sins.'

Acts 2:38 resumes and adds Christ to pre-Christian Mark 1:4+Luke 3:3 baptisms of conversion to "repentance for |remission of sins" (NASB|ASV) and fulfills Christ's mandate at Luke 24:47 "repentance for |remission of sins should be preached in his name" (NASB|KJV). The first time this

was obeyed, at Acts 2:38, **an obligation to get oneself baptized was presented in the middle of it.** If a person has truly repented to follow Jesus Christ, then s/he should be baptized in His Name.

'What about those unbaptized due to a mistake or lack of known opportunity?' John 3:18 about Christ makes it clear: "Whoever | believeth on him is not condemned" (TNIV|KJV).

This brings us to 1 Peter 3:21, which starts by describing the "water" mentioned in 1 Peter 3:20. About that "water": "which also after a |figure| doth now save you, even baptism, | not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a |clear conscience,| by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup> Peter does make clear that when he says "save you, even baptism" he means "not the removal of dirt from the flesh," in other words, 'not the washing.'<sup>6n</sup> He clarifies that what he means is "an appeal to God for a clear conscience." Baptism in water represents our recognition of guilt and calling upon the Lord, both of which compose repentance and faith. As Romans 6:3-5 states, baptism is in "likeness" to Christ's death and resurrection. Per 1 Corinthians 15:1-17, those events are what save us. 1 Peter 3:20b-1 shows that the water of baptism represents our repentance, and baptism is a likeness to Christ's death and resurrection, which are the causes of our salvation.

Romans 10:13 says "for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (ASV). This is true, and baptism is held as a representation of 'calling' at 1 Peter 3:20b-1. It follows that such repentance and such a calling upon the Lord should be represented by baptism.

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

<sup>1</sup> In Zodhiates, Complete WordStudy New Testament, page 397.

<sup>2</sup> In Elizabethan English, "y-" pronouns were plural, and "th-" pronouns were singular.

<sup>3</sup> The KJV does not have "your." Four of the five pre-500 C.E. Greek manuscripts have equivalent for "your" -- Metzger, Textual Commentary, page 301.

<sup>4</sup> In Acts 3:19, there is a twin command "Arrependei-vos, pois, e converteí-vos" (ARA, ARC, AEC, VRA) = "You-people-must-repent-you, therefore, and you-people-must-convert-you." This time, the underlying Greek verb tenses are exactly the same.\*

\*In Zodhiates, Complete WordStudy New Testament, page 400.

<sup>5</sup> ASV|BishB|ASV|NASB|RSV 1952|KJV; insight from "Baptism, which is symbolized by that water" (ISV).

<sup>6</sup> Peter did not want to be misunderstood as going against Ephesians 2:8-10's teaching.

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 request was how he showed acceptance. It did not take 'have to'-type compulsion; he *wanted* it.

At Acts 16:30 a jailer asked Paul and Silas "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (ASV) upon which they replied at Acts 16:31 solely "Believe on the Lord Jesus |, and you will be saved, you and all your household" (ASV|NASB). At 16:32 the jailer's family was preached to with unspecified words, then 16:33 "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, him and all his, immediately" (ASV). The matter of baptism was not of such urgency that it precluded medical treatment; the wounds of Paul and Silas were washed, and afterward baptism was done. Spiritual salvation is a more urgent matter than physical health. Therefore, it is evident that completed baptism was not seen as the deciding factor of eternity -- the belief specified was.

Despite this, at Acts 16:34 it was only after baptisms were finished that food was put out for all. On this conversion experience, completed baptisms were taken care of before eating. The comfort of food was delayed to address the high priority of new converts being baptized.

Water baptism promptly on conversion was the common New Testament-era practice repeatedly exemplified in Scripture, as reflected in the priority shown above, and in the baptism accounts in Acts -- 2:41, 8:12, 8:36-9, 9:18+22:16, 10:47-8, 16:15, 16:33-4, 18:8, 19:4-5. Nowhere in Scripture is water baptism withheld or delayed, nor should it be.

*A Thought on Significance of Water Baptism*

Rightly-knowing Gospel assenters who wish to avoid obeying a simple command doable privately in minutes should wonder:

- 1) if they truly value how Christ suffered to save them, and
- 2) how they expect to serve Jesus Christ **for life**.

**Debating such people into water does not fix their unbelief**, of which this is a symptom. 'Baptism' of unbelievers is not baptism. To 'baptize' rebels against Christ in Christ's Name is not right. They should instead be urged to come to biblical faith in Christ.

Factionism Note: 'But they did not get baptized right.'

Water baptism is but one command of Christ. 1 John 1:8-10 tells us ALL to acknowledge our sins. This means none of us has obeyed Christ rightly. We best not rally factions thinking 'We have obeyed rightly, but they have not' to any degree.

Salvation Same for Jew and Gentile? YES. Peter the Jew stated of Gentile believers that God "made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV) at Acts 15:9 and "we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they" (ASV) at Acts 15:11.

*New Testament Example of Faith – Group Healing*

Some believe that God would never do anything for us without us first completing some act to verify acceptance of the gift. However, notice Luke 17:12-9

"Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' So when He saw them, He said to them, '| Go show yourselves| to the priests.' And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well'" (NKJV|RSV 1952, NLT 1996|NKJV).

The 10 lepers were all healed: "as they went, they were cleansed" (NKJV). God knows all; they had not completed their one command to get to the priests and show themselves, yet He knew they believed and were obeying accordingly, so they were healed. This shows that God has given something when He was obeyed but no commanded act had been fully completed for Him. Further, this is in the New Testament period, and like salvation, was intended for more than a specific person.

Does God Need Signs? NO! Acts 15:8 has "And God, who knows all hearts, gave them evidence by granting them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us" (NBV) and 15:9b "cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV). God does not need us to complete acts to be external signs for Him to know faith; He knows the heart and acts on it. In fact, in this case it was He Who gave the evidence for others.

Salvation is not done on basis of when humans observe signs. Mortals do not have this importance.



### New Testament Example of Faith – Abraham

Galatians 5:6 says "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (ESV|ICB). James 2:14-26 explains how our works show us to be believers,<sup>1n</sup> culminating with "faith apart from works is dead" (ESV). We must take notice of one of the examples of how faith must be active: the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham mentioned at James 2:21-3, how "faith was active along with his works" (ESV), narrated at Genesis 22. Per Genesis 22:2, God commanded "a burnt offering" (JPS 1985). Coming to the end of the narration, Genesis 22:9 says "They arrived at the place where God had told him" (JPS 1985), then 22:10 says "And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son" (JPS 1985) -- but at 22:12 God says to Abraham "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, nor |do anything to him" (JPS 1917|JPS 1985). Later, Genesis 25:8-9 tells us "And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him" (JPS 1985). It is necessary to conclude that Abraham's "burnt offering" sacrifice of Isaac was NOT COMPLETED, yet James 2:14-26 shows it a positive example of a faith that did work.

### New Testament Example of Faith – When Christ Died

At Luke 22:50 we read Jesus saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (ASV) announcing a New Covenant. Starting at Hebrews 7:22b "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant" (NASB) the passage continues to Hebrews 8:6-7: "But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second" (ASV). The New Testament recognizes between Judaism and Christianity only two covenants: an Old Covenant and a "second covenant" = "New Covenant" in Christ's blood.

Matthew 27:50-1a has "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom" (TNIV). This curtain separated the rest of the temple from the innermost part, which had the presence of God and could only be entered by one certain priest on stringent conditions. When this curtain tore, it marked the end of the Old Covenant; God ripped that barrier apart Himself from Heaven's direction down. This is important, because it shows the relevance of one of the first people saved under the New Covenant.

Some people personally scorn the Thief on the Cross for the story's implications in baptism disputes. This ought not be; Christ accepted him as eternal companionship when he believed.<sup>2n</sup>

Originally, he mocked the Lord Jesus on the cross per Matthew 27:44 "And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way" (ESV). The end of the thief's words are at Luke 23:41-3 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus,<sup>3n</sup> remember me when You come into Your Kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise'" (NASB). Although this thief was originally antagonistic to Jesus, upon this thief's repentance, Jesus assured the man of being in the same place as righteous Jesus Himself after death!

When we read more, we see that after Jesus died, those on crosses next to Him remained alive:

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<sup>1</sup> James 2:24 "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (ESV). This is like Jesus' saying in Matthew 11:19 "wisdom is justified by her works" (ASV). Wisdom was already good, as seen in Proverbs, but it is shown to be thus by its results.

<sup>2</sup> Even if he had done John the Baptist's ritual, it would not have been valid because he had not met the conditions "repentance" and Acts 19:4 "should believe on |Him who was coming after him" (ASV|NASB); the thief was a thief and a scorner of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Of seven Greek manuscripts from before 500 C.E., only three have the reading rendered in the KJV "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me..."; the three oldest manuscripts and a fourth have the ancient reading which is followed in the NASB.

--Scrivener, Bezae, page 257; Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, pages xvii, 283; Aland et al, Novum Testamentum Graece, page 240.

- At John 19:30 Jesus Christ dies
- At John 19:31 the Jewish leaders asked that those on the crosses would have their legs broken to speed up their deaths so that the crosses would be vacant the next day, and
- At John 19:32 both of Jesus' neighbors had their legs broken.

Recall that at the very moment of Jesus' death, the Old Covenant was literally ripped from top to bottom, but the penitent thief was still alive. Jesus knows all things per John 16:30-3. Jesus knew when the penitent thief would die. The penitent thief, however, was promised a place with righteous Jesus by Jesus Himself. Hence, when the penitent thief died after Jesus' death, he was not saved by anything other than the New Covenant that all Christians are saved under, and Jesus expected this.

This event gives valuable insights into how we are saved. Romans 4:5 says "And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" (ESV). The penitent thief had no opportunity to do anything to confirm his new faith. While Romans 10:9 requires willingness to confess Jesus as Lord, Luke 23:41-3 as originally written<sup>1n</sup> shows not even this action -- the thief recognized Jesus' authority over a kingdom, so no doubt would have confessed Him as Lord. The only recorded things the thief did here was show realization that his sins deserved punishment and call on Jesus to treat him with mercy -- and Jesus gave him salvation.

### Simplicity: A Detailed Narration of Conversion

2 Corinthians 11:3 refers to "the **simplicity** and the purity that is toward Christ" (ASV). To illustrate this simplicity, consider a detailed conversion in 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."<sup>2n</sup>

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 in the next authentic verse<sup>3n</sup>: Acts 8:38 "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him" (NBV). Philip got no opportunity to teach 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Of seven Greek manuscripts from before 500 C.E., only three have the reading rendered in the King James Version "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me..."; the three oldest manuscripts and a fourth have the ancient reading which is followed in the NASB "And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me...'"

--Scrivener, Bezae, page 257; Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, pages xvii, 283; Aland et al, Novum Testamentum Graece, page 240.

<sup>2</sup> The Bible text has at Acts 8:35 what is translatable "told him the Good News about Jesus" or "preached unto him Jesus." It does NOT have any text translatable

- 1) 'preached unto him a collection of beliefs on details of academic religion,'
- 2) 'preached unto him pre-emptive stands to take in potential future disputes,'
- 3) 'preached unto him the precepts and procedures of good congregations.'

The Bible text has at Acts 8:35 what is translatable "told him the Good News about Jesus" or "preached unto him Jesus."

<sup>3</sup> Most Greek manuscripts with what is now Acts 8 do not have what is now versified as "Acts 8:37."\* Some of those with such text do not include all of it (AmerV margin). Further, it is not present in any of the ancient Greek manuscripts from before the year 500.\*\* Both the evidences of quantity and age testify to the fact that what is now versified as "Acts 8:37" was not in Acts when Acts was written.

\* J. White, The King James Only Controversy, page 63;  
Hills, The King James Version Defended, page 154.

\*\* In Sayão, Novo Testamento Trilíngüe: Grego, Português, Inglês, page 415.

In Acts 8:26-39, the Ethiopian official was taught "the Good News about Jesus" (ICB). To show acceptance of the Good News about Jesus Christ, he requested baptism. It was promptly given. Immediately afterward, Philip was taken away. The Lord then allowed the Ethiopian official to continue on his way back to regular life. Enough had been done.

We should not under-appreciate the significance of this. Philip did not get to teach him anything else besides "the Good News about Jesus" (ICB). As far as God Himself was concerned, this itself was enough – and God Himself acted accordingly after the request was granted.

Furthermore, when the Ethiopian eunuch had been given the privilege of water baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ, enough had been done. He was not directed to stay in Palestine or Egypt so that he could attend a church congregation. He was not given further instruction on a plethora of details. This happened instead: "he went joyfully on his way" (NBV) back to Ethiopia per Acts 8:39 so that he could live out his Christian faith in regular life. God's direct activity enabled this.

When it comes to Christian conversion, when a person accepts "the Good News about Jesus" (ICB), this is sufficient. What it takes for a person to be a Christian is that simple.

### Distinguishing Faith and Response Works

Remember that what we call "Ephesians" was originally a general letter because KJV "at Ephesus" was not in the oldest manuscripts containing 1:1.<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10 says "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). We are saved "through faith" and "not a result of works." Ephesians 4:5 in the same epistle has "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (NBV). James 2:17 shows that faith is impersonal "it" and "itself" (ASV), but the Lord is a Person, so just as faith is not the Lord, Ephesians 4:5 shows baptism is distinct from faith<sup>2n</sup>; when Ephesians 2:8-10 says we are saved "through faith" and "not a result of" plural "works," baptism is excluded, but is one of those works referred to as coming from salvation.

Paul had a similar separation in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 9:22b-23 records Paul writing "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. | And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof" (TNIV|ASV). Paul wanted to do anything right to get people salvation. It is very informative that he wrote at 1 Corinthians 1:14 "I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except" (TNIV) a few

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

<sup>2</sup> Those who believe in salvation only upon completed baptism often use notions absent from Scripture, such as 'God meets us in baptism' or 'In baptism we contact the blood of Jesus.' Of course, these non-Scriptural notions imply that even as unregenerate, by our own actions we move ourselves toward salvation, contrary to Romans 8:2b-8 and Ephesians 2:8-10.

**THIS IS A PERIL OF ADVANCING NON-BIBLICAL DOCTRINES: THEY ARE POTENTIALLY ANTI-BIBLICAL.**  
Likewise, if salvation is 'through faith upon baptism' and a baptizee has the same faith  
1) before baptism which motivates confirmation of that faith by baptism, and  
2) which s/he is acknowledged to have after coming up from baptism,  
then s/he would not be saved because of the faith but rather because of the baptism.  
Why? In this viewpoint, the person had such faith, yet was not saved. In this  
viewpoint, that person with such faith remained unsaved until completed baptism.  
Hence, 'salvation by faith through baptism' is simply 'salvation by baptism.'

**It is not possible for a believer to remain unsaved.** Acts 10:43 expressly says "everyone that believeth on him |receives| remission of sins" (ASV|ESV|ASV). Because baptism is motivated by faith, completed water baptism is at a separate moment from belief. Therefore, if salvation is 'by faith through baptism,' then there are people who "believeth on him" who have not received "remission of sins" -- a direct contradiction to this passage.

Therefore, salvation 'through faith by baptism' must be contrary to Scripture.

people, and at 1:17a he writes "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (ASV). It follows that if Paul wanted "by all possible means" to "save," yet saw no need to baptize, then baptism must not have been part of the means for people to be saved.

Paul was not sent by Jesus Christ to baptize per 1 Corinthians 1:17, but he did write this to the same audience at 1 Corinthians 3:5-6: "What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him. I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (ASV). Paul takes credit for planting the seeds of their salvation, yet baptized only a few of them. Paul clearly did not consider the act of baptism to be part of the means of attaining salvation.

At John 4:1-2 Jesus was involved in baptizing, but "Jesus himself did not baptize. His followers did" (ICB). At 12:47 He said "I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world" (ICB); He came to "save" but "did not baptize," showing distinction. John 6:28-9 says "The people asked Jesus, 'What are the works God wants us to do?' Jesus answered 'The work God wants you to do is this: to believe | on him whom he hath sent'" (ICB | ASV). They asked for a plurality of "works" to "do," but Jesus had just one -- belief on Him. The underlying Greek is JOHN'S USAGE<sup>1n</sup> to convey exactly what Jesus communicated either in Greek or Aramaic. When Jesus said at 6:29 that the single "work" "believe" and that ONE "work" only is what "God wants" us "to do," baptism was excluded. At John 4:1-2 and 12:47, Jesus separated saving and baptizing; we earlier saw that Paul did likewise.

The term "work of faith" appears in the KJV and ASV of a few passages: 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11, although the underlying Greek differs for both. In both cases, it refers to a faith that already exists and is active and doing good things in general. The term is never used to describe a specific work that makes "faith" into "faith" only upon completion of it. In other words, "work of faith" in Scripture is never shown to be a specific work with the following significance: "'Faith' is NOT 'faith' until that work is completed -- only upon completion of that work is 'faith' made 'faith.'" This definition of "work of faith" is not a definition found in Scripture -- the Scriptures mean it as general activity motivated by already existing faith among people who are identified as already-saved Christians. In studying Bible teachings, let us insist on Bible meanings for Bible terms.

### The Moment of Salvation

Acts 10:34-48, 11:4-17, and 15:8-9 all describe one event: a Jewish-Christian apostle converted a group of Gentiles for the first time. This is after Peter's first sermon to Jews in Acts 2, and it was of such significance that it is gone over *THREE* times in Acts and was a basis for a major decision<sup>2n</sup> at Acts 15. A recounting in Acts 11:14 has lead-up where Cornelius was told that Peter had "a message though which you and all your household will be saved" (TNIV). During the event, Peter said in Acts 10:43b-4 "through his name every one that believeth on him | receives | remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word" (ASV|ESV|ASV). This was before the converts said anything, and before Peter "commanded them to be baptized" (ESV) in Acts 10:48. The passage says that to "believeth on" Jesus Christ brings "remission of sins."<sup>3n</sup>

When they "heard" this, the Holy Spirit fell on them. The word translated "heard" is ακουοντας a form of the word ακουω<sup>4</sup> and means "hearken, listen to," "heed, obey," "take in or admit to mental acceptance"<sup>5</sup> and regarding discipleship "follow, obey."<sup>6</sup> When they listened to this teaching in such a way to it as to intend to do what it said, the Holy Spirit came down on them.

<sup>1</sup> In writing the Bible, God authorized His human secretary-authors to use their distinct personal styles. This does not negate that every word is what God directed written. These personal styles complement each other and should not be used against each other.

<sup>2</sup> **The New Testament-era church clearly did NOT consider the event an exception.**

<sup>3</sup> This occurs upon such belief whether or not a convert is aware of this or a decision.

<sup>4</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, pages 583 and Greek Dictionary 4.

<sup>5</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 113.

<sup>6</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 40.

The general epistle of Paul now called "Ephesians" shows this was a universal phenomenon. Ephesians 1:13 says "In whom, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed in Him, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (NASB alternate) and 1:14a continues "He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession" (HCSB). Greek translated "listening" is ακουοντες a form of ακουω<sup>1</sup> and means "hearken, listen to," "heed, obey," "take in or admit to mental acceptance"<sup>2</sup> and about discipleship "follow, obey."<sup>3</sup> When we decide to heed the Gospel and follow it, the Holy Spirit is delivered to us.

This event was gone over *THREE* times in Scripture. When Peter recalled the occasion at Acts 15:8-9, he said "And God, who knoweth the heart, | gave them evidence |, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (ASV|NBV|ASV). Titus 3:5 by Paul has "él nos salvó, no por nuestras propias obras de justicia sino por su misericordia. Nos salvó mediante el lavamiento de la regeneración y de la renovación | of the Holy Spirit" (NVI|ASV) = "He us He-saved, not by our own works of righteousness but by His mercy. Us He-saved through the washing of the regeneration and of the renovation/renewal of the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:5 and Acts 10:34-48+11:4-17+15:8-9 describe the same phenomenon<sup>4n</sup>: upon acceptance of the Gospel by faith, the Holy Spirit comes and gives us a washing that regenerates us.

Only *AFTER* this happened did any convert say anything that might have been a confession of Jesus as Lord as at Acts 10:45-6 "magnify God" (ASV), or be baptized as happened at Acts 10:48.

### After the Moment of Salvation

The birth of a Christian life is only the beginning. Ephesians 2:8-10 specifies "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).

Galatians 5:6 describes faith: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, | but only | the kind of faith that works through love" (NASB|ESV|ICB). Romans 1:17 has "the righteous shall live by faith" (ASV) and Romans 2:7 mentions the attribute "perseverance in doing good" (NASB). We are saved by faith, but that faith must be one that motivates good works. Philippians 2:12b says "ocupaos en vuestra salvación" (RVR 1909/1960/1995, RVA) = "You-busy-you in your salvation." We are saved by faith, but our faith must be one that motivates us to act on it.

Galatians 6:2 refers to "the law of Christ" (ASV), and to follow it here: "Help each other with your troubles" (ICB). Romans 7:22 says "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (ESV). The Lord wants us doing what is good, and our faith should make us desire this from the inside.

Hebrews 6:1-2a says "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us | press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from | acts that lead to death | and of faith toward God" (NKJV|NASB|ICB|NASB). A foundation of being Christian includes turning from sins which unbelievers of any religious background or lack thereof would do. If any professing Christian does not show having done this, IF s/he ever was a Christian, s/he has not matured.

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). *PURE* "religion," the underlying Greek literally meaning "religious service,"<sup>5</sup> is to serve people and to stay away from sin that pervades the world outside church assembly.

James 2:18b says "I will show you my faith by my works" (NASB); works show pre-existing faith, and faith is shown by works. At Matthew 25:31b-46, the Lord Jesus preached that we will be judged by whether or not our faith motivated us to do good things to people for Him. Behold:

<sup>1</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, pages 583 and Greek Dictionary 4.

<sup>2</sup> In Perschbacher, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 113.

<sup>3</sup> Friberg et al, Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament, page 40.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:11 refers to this phenomenon "ye were washed" (ASV).

<sup>5</sup> In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

"then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 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: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 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: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 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).

Neither here nor anywhere else is there a mention of a test of what our meeting-time doctrines were, how we worshiped during meeting-time, etc. – recall the 1 Corinthians 4:6 New Testament church maxim. *Our test will be whether or not our faith motivated us to go out and obey Him by serving.*

Jesus had much to say to us in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. He said in 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). Jesus meant that if we have done something wrong to someone, we are to forego specific worship entirely until we try to make it right. God cares nothing of our worship services if we are not doing what is good outside of worship in everyday life.

Jesus warned about false prophets at Matthew 7:15-6, and at 7:17 extended this to people as a whole; Matthew 3:8/Luke 3:10-4 indicate "fruit" (ASV) refers to deeds done, and Matthew 7:18-21 has

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" [ASV emphasis mine].

Notice again Matthew 7:20, also translated "*Similarly, you will know people by the deeds they do*" (NBV). Our status as Christians is known by what our faith motivates us to do. If we meet a group who seems to 'talk the right talk,' but we see most of the people including those 'of good standing' do regularly without even a twinge of conscience actions contrary to Scripture which 'decent' people in secular society would disdain,<sup>1</sup> we are likely *NOT* looking at Christians. At Luke 6:46 Christ pointed out "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (ASV).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, there are groups of buildings where Scripture's proper authority is best spoken of among all church-related groups, but they often engage in tricks of deception and false slander/reviling in religious matters and esteem it a skill of 'furthering the truth.' Belief that deception supports truth is contra-Scriptural: "no lie is of the truth" (ASV) per 1 John 2:21. Christians in real churches that affiliate themselves with such buildings are commonly desensitized to dishonesty.

Some groups gladly treat people with malice *inside* their buildings for religious motives. Some groups go out to gleefully harass people with hateful vitriol. A lot of people abuse 'the Holy Spirit' to justify doing things that they should not. The "elementary principles" (NKJV) include "repentance from acts that lead to death" (NASB|ICB) in Hebrews 6:1-2, and this has been entirely missed. If people routinely disregard what Jesus Christ taught us to do and not do, then it does not matter what 'credentials' they appeal to -- they are not Christians.

ACTIONS THAT ARE SINS OUT IN THE WORLD ARE ALSO SINS IN RELIGIOUS SETTINGS.  
DOING WHAT THE LORD TAUGHT AGAINST UNDER GUISE OF 'SERVING THE LORD' ACTUALLY BLASPHEMES HIM.

## Addressing Common Misconceptions about Faith

### Miscellaneous Common Misconception #1 of 4

As seen throughout *Part 4*, New Testament instances of "faith"/"believe" for salvation mean much more than just intellectual assent. Many abuse 'I believe in Jesus' to only mean His existence, but do not believe what He said of Himself, and have no real intent to live obediently to Him as their Lord. People who would twist Scripture's teaching of 'salvation by grace through faith' to self-excuse lives of willful disobedience do so to their own destruction in the pattern of 2 Peter 3:16b, which says "which the ignorant and unstedfast | twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (ASV | ESV). All of time will have sinners who twist Scripture to justify lives of willful disobedience.

Despite this, we are called to be "speaking the truth" (ESV) per Ephesians 4:15, and should obey the New Testament churches' Greek maxim at 1 Corinthians 4:6 quoted in the footer below. We should not tarnish our messages on salvation to accommodate for abuses by the disobedient.<sup>1n</sup> We are not authorized to teach that salvation is completed by acts of obedience 'to be on the safe side.' Rather, we must teach salvation "by faith" and explain the Bible meaning of the Bible term.

### Miscellaneous Common Misconception #2 of 4

Some people think 'faith' means 'rightness.' James 2:19 rhetorically has "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons | believe that too, | and shudder" (ESV | ICB | ASV). Despite the importance of this religious fact, believing it is not valid faith. This is true of any other religious fact.

Some people think that 'faith' is a proper detailed understanding/knowledge about some subject/s. 1 Corinthians shows this to be untrue. The Corinthian congregation had a slogan translated "I have a right to do anything" (TNIV) or "I am allowed to do anything" (NLT 1996) mentioned at 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23; Paul had to address this bad doctrine. Still, they were greeted as a "church of God" (ASV) at 1 Corinthians 1:2. After rebuke after rebuke over error and sin, 1 Corinthians 15:58 says "So my dear brothers, stand strong. Do not let anything change you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. You know that your work in the Lord is never wasted" (ICB). 1 Corinthians 15:1-2a says "Now brothers, I want you to remember the Good News I brought to you. You received this Good News, and you continue strong in it. And you are saved by this Good News" (ICB). Despite big error, those people were still saved Christians.

Christ said at Matthew 7:20 "by their fruits ye shall know them" (ASV) = "you will know people by the deeds they do" (NBV). It is NEVER said 'you will know them by what they think.' Christ said we would recognize His followers by what they do.

After the apostles died, the only words of the apostles that could be referred to were the New Testament Scriptures. Printing did not exit until the mid-1400's. Before that, Scripture had to be copied by hand. Hand-copying documents is still drudgery, and it was worse in ancient and medieval conditions. That a copy of Scripture took months and even years of taxing manual labor made widespread availability of Scripture impossible. Common ancient and medieval Christians could not have possibly spent hours every day poring over their own private copies of Scripture<sup>2n</sup> to ensure that the finest details of their beliefs were absolutely in line with what was in Scripture, because in all but rare exceptions, they had no private copies. Absolute 'doctrinal correctness' was not possible. It would have been impossible to be saved that way; 'saving faith' cannot entail that.

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, many church people hate teachings on grace. They claim that 'teaching grace' promotes sin. Their reasoning: 'If God would forgive failure to serve rightly, there is no reason to bother with an effort.' They show that they would prefer to sin, and refrain mainly to avoid Hell.

Paul wrote at Romans 5:20 and 3:8b "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (ASV) and so "we are being slandered and charged with saying, 'Let us do evil, so that good may result'" (NBV). Of those: "their condemnation is just" (NASB). The unbelievers in those texts claimed 'teaching grace' promotes sin; people who claim that 'teaching grace promotes sin' should notice their unholy company.

<sup>2</sup> As noted by numerous Orthodox and Catholic apologists, but for another reason.

God "hath granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (ASV) per 2 Peter 1:3. For centuries after Scripture's completion, most Christians did not have private copies to pore over for pristine accuracy, and this was so even as the New Covenant began. 'Saving faith' cannot be pristine rightness on Scripture's teachings on any subject. 1 Corinthians 1:17 reports Paul was sent "to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void" (ASV). We should not presume that we get ourselves saved by any kind of perfection on our part, including in intellect.

*Miscellaneous Common Misconception #3 of 4*

Some confuse faith with works that faith motivates.<sup>1n</sup> Some think doing specific "works of faith" has itself made them 'faithful.' Some use the term "work of faith" to mean this: 'only after this work is completed is there any faith.' The term "work of faith" appears in the KJV, ASV, and others at 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11, although the underlying Greek differs for both. In neither case does it convey the errant meaning; in both cases, it refers to acknowledged Christians, whose faith already existed, and was active doing good deeds in general. James 2:18b says "I will show you my faith by my works" (NASB); works are not faith, because works show pre-existent faith.

The work most deemed 'faith' is baptism, which has been much trifled with. Some who urge baptism say one could hypothetically refuse baptism yet be a believer; we have already studied how this is wrong.<sup>2n</sup> Others so focus on baptism that they are unsure of or reject salvations of believers without completed baptism *despite* Acts 16:31/Romans 4:5 faith. 1830's Alexander Campbell wrote

*"We can not tell with certainty. But I am of the opinion that when a neglect proceeds from a simple mistake or sheer ignorance, and when there is no aversion, but a will to do everything the Lord commands, the Lord will admit into the everlasting kingdom those who by reason of this mistake never..."*<sup>3</sup>

This extreme esteem of baptism causes doubt in discord with Jesus Christ's teachings of Himself at John 3:16-8, most notably "Whoever | believeth on him is not condemned" (ESV|ASV).

To baptize or to do a related ceremony, or to accept a baptism as valid, some Christians and church-associated persons require conditions beyond biblical faith, such as:

- requiring converts to make the baptizer's congregation their home congregation;
- deliberate delays, such as multiple instruction classes, or waiting periods to verify genuine conversion;
- an audience to witness the baptism publicly;
- a baptizer with specific status beyond simply being a Christian;
- religious group-centered dispositions having little-to-nothing to do with Christ Himself;
- trivialities, such as wordings more specific than simply involving some designation of Jesus, or agreement with them about specific function of baptism, or direction into the water, or number of dips in the water.

People ought not hijack baptism for themselves, or obstruct obeying Christ in baptism, but it happens.

Matthew 28:19 tells us to baptize Christ's followers; as much or for as long as any refuses to baptize a Christian, s/he is at discord with the command of Christ. Note the 1 Corinthians 4:6 maxim; we are not authorized to withhold baptism from Christians. Any Christians not baptized due to any unauthorized condition should seek Christians who would baptize them as soon as feasible without unauthorized conditions.<sup>4n</sup> Other people may need to notice that baptism is a mandated follow-up of biblical faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, but not the main event. Also, it is no substitute for following Christ's ways - without a decision to follow His ways, a 'baptism' ceremony is not a baptism.

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<sup>1</sup> Also, some people mistake repentance for works it causes. Acts 26:20 has "repent and turn to God and do works consistent with repentance" (NBV). Works are not repentance.

<sup>2</sup> This is why arguing knowingly-unbaptized people into baptism pools is wrong. Baptism is authorized and fitting only for Christians, so only after a Gospel assenter becomes a believer is it proper to move for baptism. For more, see the *Baptism in Water* essay.

<sup>3</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, page 175.

<sup>4</sup> Congregations self-named "\_\_\_\_\_ Christian church" commonly baptize on request, and do so regardless of person's home congregation or other unauthorized non-Scripture conditions. Also, contrary to many congregation norms, ANY Christian can baptize.



Some wrongly call ceremonies that are not baptism to be "baptism," such as for non-converts and/or without immersion. Any person not having done the Bible meaning of the Bible term βαπτισμα "baptism" is not baptized, and ideally would disregard any substitute ritual to get baptized. Still, some victims wrongly think they are baptized, and think a wrongly-called 'rebaptism' would be a sin. Even worse, some Christians think water baptism is currently prohibited. In both such cases, the people's biblical faith is no less genuine, so their status as Christians should be fully accepted.

The overall conversion experience has been mutilated; it is sad, but the effects are lasting. Therefore, we must remember that it is biblical faith, not response works, which makes a Christian.

*Miscellaneous Common Misconception #4 of 4*

Some people think that 'being faithful' means 'faithful' attendance and support of a 'church with sound doctrine.'<sup>1n</sup> 'Being faithful' means agreeing with the 'right' distinctly-religious tenets<sup>2n</sup> and supporting a group whose people agree with and enforce the same. Some non-Christian groups<sup>3n</sup> imitating churches<sup>4n</sup> have a parallel belief – plus that salvation comes from this. They encourage a belief that someone is a 'faithful Christian' if s/he supports 'the right group.'

Such belief systems too often call for no personal transformation to follow Christ's ways in overall life; the main way or sole way to "be faithful" is unrelated to this. Adherents are too often expected to oppose Christian groups -- where such transformation would be a priority. Adherents too often face reduced chance of conversion, or damaged transformation if they become Christians.

Many people among them see no need for inner change, and so do not adopt Christ's values. They fixate on acts of external compliance, for they notice no increase in willingness to serve Christ. Many such people refuse to adopt Christ's prescribed ways and values. Like other unbelievers, some continue to do as they wish when it suits their utmost interests – in their case, the interests of their religious groups. Often, wickedness to promote group interests is condoned or encouraged.

Jesus Christ faced a similar religious society. It eventually obtained perjury at Matthew 26:59-61 and murdered Him; while doing this wickedness, they took great care to religious doings at John 18:28 and 19:31. They paid great attention to religious precepts and assumed God would 'okay' their evil. At Matthew 23:15, He 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).

Diverting faith is dangerous. Assent to group religious precepts which have no direct focus on Jesus Christ, and which focus on the group's religion, cannot be substituted for biblical faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. The extreme of actually making this substitution can be highly corrosive.

Biblical faith is not shown by showing devotion to religious tenets or showing oneself 'right' about them. Rather, biblical faith is shown by following Christ's values and ways in our whole lives.

### Summary of Salvation

A marvel of salvation is that it takes disobedient unregenerate people unable to please God, regenerates them by faith, after which they can and want to serve Him. Christ died "to | redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, *zealous of good works*" (ESV|ASV emphases mine) per Titus 2:14. Romans 12:1-2 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. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of

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<sup>1</sup> Self-attachment to a church congregation or imitation is worthless without biblical faith. Congregations do not 'federate' to make the church. Per Acts 2:47/5:14, people "being saved" (NASB) "believers" (ESV) get "added to" (ASV) the whole church by the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> Some such people think 'strong faith' is shown by being personally nasty to people holding tenets they disagree with.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that there are no Christians among them.

<sup>4</sup> Often, such groups mesh in among a denomination/'fellowship'/'brotherhood.' However, regardless of similarity of group tenets, non-followers of Christ are not Christians.

your mind" (NBV | ESV). Salvation affects our minds so that we should be "zealous" to please God in the earnest desires of our hearts – *NOT* 'we must or else' semi-fearful compulsion-motivation.

We are saved by biblical faith in the Gospel, including to truly recognize Jesus Christ to be Lord and to resolve to act on that. Biblical faith involves a realization that Christ's prescribed ways are right and should be followed. It involves repentance from sin and obedience from the heart outward. At the moment this happens, a convert is given God's free gift of salvation without works.

With normal opportunity and circumstances, a new Christian will earnestly seek and do good deeds. S/he will confess Jesus as Lord and get baptism when knowing rightly and opportunity is not withheld. S/he will do these things as specifics within an overall lifestyle of general good works.

To 'obey the Gospel' means much more than any worship-specific conversion deed.<sup>1n</sup> It calls us to appeal to Christ, submit our wills to the will of Jesus Christ as Lord in obedience, turn from sin in repentance, adopt His prescribed ways in discipleship, and begin doing good deeds of service to Him in every aspect of our lives. For example, if a person with a profanity problem accepts the Gospel at home, calls a church official to meet at a baptistery, and then on the way there 'bites the tongue' on a profanity because s/he has resolved to serve the Lord, the convert has completed an act of obedience. Of course, s/he was saved beforehand by the faith that motivated 'biting the tongue.'

Salvation is by biblical faith; biblical faith motivates action. Let us now review the following:

† 1 Corinthians 15 verse 1b "the gospel" (ASV) - "the Good News" (ICB), 15:2a "by which you are saved" (NBV), 15:3b-5a "this was what was most important: that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say; that he was buried and was raised to life on the third day as the Scriptures say, and that he showed himself to..." (ICB).

† 1 Peter 2:24a and Corinthians 5:21 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (ESV) and "he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (ESV).

† Romans 1:17a "The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself – that it begins and ends with faith" (NCV). *Believe:* *Repent:*

† Acts 16:31b "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (ASV | NASB).

† Luke 24:47b "repentance |para = in-order-for| remission of sins should be preached in| His name" (ASV | RVA and translated | ASV | NBV).

† Acts 10:43b "every one that believeth on him |receives| remission of sins" (ASV | ESV | ASV)

† Acts 3:19a "Arrependedei-vos, pois, e convertei-vos para |serem cancelados os vuestros pecados" (ARC | ARA) = "You-people-must-repent-you, therefore, and you-people-must-convert-you in-order-for they-will-be canceled the your sins."

† Romans 4:5 "And to the one| who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."<sup>2</sup>

† Ephesians 2:8-10 "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 himselfe. 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).

*Make It Active -- General And Specific :*

† Acts 26:20b "they must repent and turn to God and do works consistent with repentance" (NBV).

† Acts 2:38a "You-people-must-repent-you -- |and so| let-s/he-get-self-baptized each one of you| in the name of Jesus Christ -- | in order to the remission of |you-people's sins"<sup>3</sup>

† 1 Peter 3:20b-1 "water: which also after a |figure| doth now save you, even baptism,| not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a |clear conscience,| by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"<sup>4</sup>

† Romans 10:9 "That if you might confess in| your mouth Jesus as Lord, and |might trust| in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."<sup>5</sup>

† James 2:18 and 2:26 "I will show you my faith by my works" (NASB) and "faith without deeds is dead" (TNIV).

† 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).

† Philippians 2:12b "ocupaos en vuestra salvación" (RVR 1909/1960/1995, RVA) = "You-busy-you in your salvation."

<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:16 has "they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'" (ESV). 'Obey the Gospel' = 'believe.'

<sup>2</sup> ESV | A. Campbell et al, Living Oracles, page 290.

<sup>3</sup> For sources of this translation, please see the lengthy source note on the first page of *Part 4*.

<sup>4</sup> ASV | BishB | ASV | NASB | RSV 1952 | KJV; insight from "Baptism, which is symbolized by that water" (ISV).

<sup>5</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 576 | NASB | McReynolds, *ibid.* | NASB, NBV.

### What All This Means

We are saved by Christ through biblical faith in the Gospel. We are not saved by any other means on our part.<sup>1n</sup> There would be less occasion to bicker about conversion experience and validity of each other's conversion experiences if New Testament procedures were followed by all and deviations avoided when feasible. Salvation of people was the whole point for the Son of God to leave Heaven and endure life and agonizing death as a human being while bearing the divine penalty for people's sins. Therefore, I wish more believed that the experience of the conversion linked to salvation should *NEVER* be trifled with in *any* way by the churches in normal practice: this includes timing, order, or any other matter.<sup>2n</sup>

However, this is not happening, and so in our imperfect world, when we consider Christian unity and who is a Christian, let us all heed how little we have to do with our own salvations. Human doings during conversion experiences do not make people into Christians. Before any of us alive in the natural universe was even conceived, Jesus Christ died in agony on a cross after saying "Todo ha terminado" (NTV) = "All has-been finished" at John 19:30. He did ALL the work and paid the whole price by Himself<sup>3n</sup>; all that is left for us is to accept it by biblical faith,<sup>4n</sup> upon which we become Christians.

In John 6:68 a disciple told Jesus why they followed Him: "thou hast the words of eternal life" (ASV). Before the time of Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples" in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek

### Two Bases of Christian Fellowship

1 John 1:9a commends us "if we acknowledge our sinnes" (GenB); every Christian sins, and needs forgiveness. Colossians 3:13 has "if one has| a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye" (ESV|ASV); this includes dislikes of how others serve the Lord.

Romans 14:4 has "That servant's master decides whether he is a good or bad servant, not you" (PEB). As this is solely God's business, we should do as Colossians 3:13 says in such dislikes.

Paul's letter to the general church is now called "Ephesians" because a scribe added Greek equivalent to "At Ephesus" (KJV); this text is not in any pre-400 C.E. manuscripts,<sup>5</sup> and without the addition, the translation differs slightly and the letter is simply to all "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.

Hebrews 2:11 says of God "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 by biblical faith. When thus saved they compose *ONE FAMILY* and are all fully accepted as family by Jesus Christ.

Before Acts 11:26, Christians were called "disciples": "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); "disciples" = "followers" (ICB). Christians are followers of Christ.

No mortal is in a position to second-guess whom Jesus Christ has accepted because Jesus Christ is Lord. Further, as followers of Jesus Christ, when Jesus Christ adopts people into His family, we should accept them fully as the same. Our attitude should also be "Anyone who serves Jesus Christ is a friend of mine."

<sup>1</sup> No works -- all week INCLUDING any weekend hours -- and no non-simple **knowledge/understanding**.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the "sinner's prayer" should not usurp the role Scripture gives baptism.

<sup>3</sup> Christians who implicitly argue over who 'deserves' salvation more because of the distinctives of their congregation or group of congregations forget how little they had to do with their salvations. Romans 8:2-8b shows that the unregenerate are incapable of even pleasing God. Ephesians 2:8-9 calls salvation "gift of God" and "not of works, lest any man should |boast himselfe" (KJV|GenB). There are those who boast that they ought to get this GIFT but not someone else due to meeting place. One tempted to boast as so should think about this: how might God react to people bickering over who 'deserves' His salvation GIFT more and whose squabble centers on

1) where they assemble, which is something they do, and

2) things that have no *REAL* bearing on how Christians live outside the handful of hours per week that Christians meet?

Thought on this question should prompt at the very least some hesitation.

<sup>4</sup> In Scripture, when discussing salvation, most speech and text is spent on the subject of faith, not response works. That was New Testament-era church practice.

<sup>5</sup> In Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

μαθητας translated "disciples" here is plural for "one who follows one's teachings"<sup>1</sup> and is rendered "followers" in the ICB here at Acts 11:26. Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. Salvation is granted simply upon genuine decision to turn to Christ in reliance and live as His follower. Our biblical faith in Jesus Christ will cause us to

1. recognize Him as the Savior we depend on for salvation, and
2. recognize Him as Lord, and therefore be obedient to Him and serve Him;

the fruits of biblical faith are good deeds that Jesus Christ taught us to do -- biblical faith<sup>2n</sup> makes people followers of Jesus Christ, and that *ALONE* makes any person a Christian. All persons with biblical faith are Christians.

*An Implication of Biblical Faith on Unity*

Hebrews 11 examples how biblical faith should involve believing **simply because God so says it**.<sup>\*</sup> This is important to accept regarding Christian unity.

★ No matter how much someone agrees with us on valued religious tenets, if s/he does not show in overall life the signs prescribed by Jesus Himself to recognize His real followers, such as Matthew 5-7 culminating at Matthew 7:20-3, we simply cannot regard that person as a Christian.

★ We **MUST** recognize and fully accept as fellow sibling and fellow servant of Christ *any* person who is His follower. It does not matter if s/he 'fails' to agree with any of us on valued religious tenets. It does not matter what 'dangers' any of us think we see in accepting -- without 'family feud'/mitigation -- such fellow servants as fellow **family of Christ**.

Biblical faith is believing the Lord and submitting obediently *simply because the LORD says so*.

<sup>\*</sup>As described in Breneman, Biblia de Estudio HarperCaribe, page 1258 -- "simplemente porque Dios así lo dice."

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>2</sup> Biblical faith involves believing **simply because God so says it**,<sup>\*</sup> and it involves obedience. Two associated attributes of biblical faith toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ often get overlooked, but they are two things Jesus Christ wanted to accompany it. These are childlikeness and love.

Matthew 18:1-4 narrates the following:

"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).

Jesus Christ wants childlike followers. A typical child will obey an adult whom s/he loves just because of trust in and love for that adult. A child should obey God out of trust in and love for God in the same way.<sup>\*\*</sup> If we are to be like children, we should be motivated by trust in and love for the Lord to serve Him.

At Luke 10:27-8, we have:

"And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' | 'Right!' Jesus told him. 'Do this and you will live!'" (ESV | NLT 1996).

The following verses, Luke 10:29-37, show the conversant looking for an exception,<sup>†</sup> prompting Jesus to tell a parable to show how we should think like this: "everyone I meet is my neighbor."<sup>††</sup> Any person whose path meets with our paths is our neighbor.

At 2 John verse 6 we see "And God's command is this: that you live a life of love. You have had this command from the beginning" (ICB). If what God commands of us is to be summarized into one command, it is that our lives should be pervaded by love. At John 15:14, Jesus said "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (ICB). If we really want to be friends of Jesus, then love needs to pervade our lives including our dealings toward God and towards people. Loving only when interacting with God, or interacting only with Him and Christians, or only with Him and 'sound Christians,' or 'sound Christians' and 'potential converts,' is *NOT* enough; our entire lives should be pervaded by love.

To obey the Lord the way He wishes, it must be motivated by love -- just as a typical child's best obedience is motivated by love. Our obedience should be motivated by love for the Lord. If we want to love the Lord as His friends, we need to seek to have every aspect of our lives be pervaded with love as well.

<sup>\*</sup> As described in Breneman, Biblia de Estudio HarperCaribe, page 1258.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Pointed out in MacArthur, John MacArthur's A Faith to Grow On Bible, page 1414.

<sup>†</sup> Noted in Hayford, New Spirit-Filled Life Bible, page 1408.

<sup>††</sup> Quoted from Living Faith Bible, page 1168.

The term "Christian" is a Bible term from the New Testament-era. To rightly understand a New Testament-era term, we cannot do so based on disputes from any time afterward, whether from the earliest centuries or from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Let us have Bible meanings for Bible terms.

The root of "Christian" is "Christ."<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings.

At Matthew 16:18, Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV); "church" translates εκκλησιαν a form of εκκλησια; in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>3</sup> Greek εκκλησια in this context was to mean the community of Jesus Christ's followers.<sup>4n</sup> Acts 2:47 examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those | who were being saved" (ASV | NASB); the church is built of people added to it. In Scripture, Jesus Christ's εκκλησια "church" simply means the community of people who believe on Jesus Christ so as to be followers of His teachings - nothing more, and not one person less.

When we consider church unity, we are discussing unity of the people who compose it: Christians. 2 Corinthians 11:3 refers to "the **simplicity** and the purity that is toward Christ" (ASV)<sup>5n</sup>; we know that whatever makes a person into a Christian is simple.<sup>6n</sup> Christians are simply people who believe on Jesus Christ so as to be followers of His teachings; all such people are Christians. When we are considering church unity, we must mean the unity of all such persons. ■

<sup>1</sup> "Christian" is not directly nor primarily defined by whom a person disagrees with.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

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

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

<sup>5</sup> To illustrate this simplicity, consider a detailed conversion in Acts 8:26-39. The Ethiopian official was puzzled over Isaiah 53. Philip, 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 text does NOT have 'preached unto him Jesus and the precepts and practices of good congregations.' The Bible text has what is translated "told him the Good News about Jesus" or "preached unto him Jesus."

The Ethiopian official responded as so: "`See, here is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?'" (NBV) at Acts 8:36. Philip promptly granted his request at Acts 8:38 "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him" (NBV). Philip got no opportunity to teach 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.

The Ethiopian official was taught about Jesus. Upon showing he had accepted the Good News about Him and was now a Christian, his request for baptism was granted. The Lord then allowed him to continue on to regular life. Enough had been done.

<sup>6</sup> It cannot take an elaborate process for a person to become a Christian. Likewise, to **BE** a Christian, it cannot require a lengthy instruction and learning process

- 1) in theology, and/or
- 2) of Bible study, and/or
- 3) of what inferences people 'should' have from Scripture, and/or
- 4) of a collection of 'stands' to take in disputes, and/or
- 5) of a collection of precepts that center on the operations of a group, and/or
- 6) of a collection of beliefs on details of academic religion, and/or
- 7) about narrow topics such as the Holy Spirit, water baptism, etc., and/or
- 8) about any other subject.

Anything requiring a lengthy instruction and learning process is not "simplicity." What is needed to become and **BE** a Christian must befit "simplicity."

## Part 5: Scripture on Unity of Christians in the Church

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

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

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

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

### The Bible Meaning of "Church"

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

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

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.<sup>2n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>3</sup> Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πέτρα. The πέτρα was what was discussed immediately before: "'You are the [Christ], the Son of the living God.'" This is the one premise that the church is built upon: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.<sup>4n</sup>

**The Bible meaning of "church" refers to people<sup>5</sup> – nothing other.<sup>6n</sup>** Greek translated "church" in the New Testament is εκκλησια. The New Testament-era readers would have been Greek-reading people who also used the Greek Septuagint Old Testament translation.

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Life Application Bible for Students, page 924.

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

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

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

In the Greek Old Testament translation Septuagint usage, εκκλησια translated a Hebrew word designating a "gathering" of Israel for a specific purpose or a "gathering" representative of all of Israel<sup>2</sup> and also referred to the general gathering of God's people without any set purpose.<sup>3</sup> It was used at Acts 7:38<sup>4</sup> in reference to Israel at Mount Sinai when Moses was delivering the Judaic Law: "the church in the wilderness" (ASV) also rendered "the assembly in the wilderness" (TNIV). When ancient Greek-reading/hearing Christians met the word in the Greek New Testament, continued use of εκκλησια regarding Christians would have identified them as the gathered mass of God's people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Warnings to Congregations in the Book of Revelation

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 42 NT.

<sup>3</sup> In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, pages 73, 76.

<sup>4</sup> In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

<sup>5</sup> In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

<sup>6</sup> In Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 76.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nicolaitans were Gnostics meshing in Christian aspects. They claimed the Christ to be distinct from Jesus, and sometime after birth this separate Christ "was descending on Jesus"<sup>1</sup> per 170's-180's Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book 3:11. Church-reported tenets include loose sexual relations while married<sup>2</sup> = adultery, and "abandoned themselves to pleasures" plus "shameless self-indulgence."<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, page 378.

<sup>2</sup> Latourette, *History of Christianity*, page 1:460.

<sup>3</sup> *Discovery Study Bible*, page 1665.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Doctrine and Its Importance: Acts, Paul, and John

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

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

Let us discuss how Scripture describes "sound doctrine" (KJV) and the *Acts 2:42* "apostles' doctrine" (KJV, NKJV). Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). Note the "I **have taught** you" - He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. The "apostles' doctrine" would be doing exactly this. The "apostles' doctrine" is not some mysterious thing hidden in Scripture needing to be gleaned out; we can simply read the teachings of Christ or hear them read to us.

Paul was an apostle, and he did just as Jesus said at Matthew 28:19-20. At *1 Corinthians 4:17* Paul reported "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere" (NBV | ESV) - he alluded to this at Acts 20:35. He gave specifics of "apostles' doctrine" and "sound doctrine" at *1 Timothy 1:3-10*

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

Paul disdained favoring speculation and instruction on fine points of the Old Testament Judaic worship Law above "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Paul mandated focus on "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" and applying the Law to sins of action typically done only outside church assembly. Those non-religious sins are "contrary to sound doctrine," which was about how to conduct our lives in and out of church settings.

We turn to the same subject at *1 Timothy 4:1-6*

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

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

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

1 *Timothy* 6:3-4 has "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and |does not adhere to| sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to |a godly life|, he is **conceited** and **understands nothing**; but he has a **morbid interest in controversial questions**."<sup>1</sup> Approved doctrine, as in its other contexts in this epistle, mainly relates to how the Christian behaves in overall living – further, anyone whose focus is off this is described in strong words: "*understands nothing*."

2 *Timothy* 4:3 has "they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (ASV). These people will turn to stories that are not true, which means away from Scripture entirely. These who turn from "sound doctrine" will follow "their own lusts." "Lust" refers to fleshly motivations for sins that people commit in normal life regardless of religion or lack thereof.

At *Titus* 1:9-12, we have it described that a church leader should have good character so

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

Again, "sound doctrine" is opposed by people with deceptive intent. The main culprits are "of the circumcision," who tried to convince Christians that they were bound by the Judaic Law, affecting all areas of life. Paul was condemning the Judaizers, who tried to pressure everyone into following the Judaic Law.<sup>2n</sup> Per Galatians 5:4, they were teaching that salvation was through the Judaic Law – exactly like before Christ, which is why such a view meant "Christ is become of no effect" (ASV). This denied the redemptive work of Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup> because He died to free us from subjection to the Judaic Law per Galatians 5:1. The idea that all Christians needed to follow the Judaic Law was rejected to the whole church before the New Testament was completed – Acts 15:24-29. *Galatians* 1:6-8 opposed Judaizers, who alleged an "other Good News" (ICB) that denied Christ's redemptive work, and who deliberately taught what they knew was false. Galatians 1:6-8 "let him be anathema" (ASV) refers to people who taught what they knew to be false, and who denied Christ's redemptive work.

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

<sup>1</sup> NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup> These were not Jewish Christians. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul " `Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses' " (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24. There was and is a difference between following the Judaic Law oneself, versus demanding that everyone do so.

<sup>3</sup> *Bíblia de Estudo Almeida*, page NT 262.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> *Open Bible*, page 1247.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Is It Doctrine?:**

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

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

\*NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

*Titus 3:8b-9a* "I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have |believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable" (ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

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

(NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

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

### Christians Have a Different Calling – Romans 12:2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We show strong faith by doing the work of the Lord the ways He told us to do it<sup>1n</sup> - even when it seems inexpedient, and it is tempting to 'cut corners.' We should do the work of the Lord adhering to the ways He told us to do it - we simply firmly trust that this is how it should be done.

'But we must not love error': Beliefs are things; people are people. We must always make that distinction.  
'But I do not do well under these standards': Either dispute according to the Lord's standards, or refrain.  
'But I think truth trumps need for love': At Luke 9:52-5, after two of Jesus' disciples asked to burn a village that rejected Him, "He turned and rebuked them" (NBV); their rightness lacked love,<sup>2</sup> and He disliked that.  
'But Jesus occasionally did vitriolic metaphors, accusations and reprimands': First, Jesus only spoke thus to people deliberately opposed to Him. Second, supernatural mind-reading is not something mortals should expect to do. Jesus Christ knows all things, including exactly what anyone is thinking; we do not. Third, He is Lord; we are not. He explicitly told us how WE are to treat people.

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Pointed out by S. E. Stone, Simply Christians, page 64.

Mishandling Doctrine and Directed Division in Church Settings

Topic #1 of 2: Nastiness

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

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

We concluded, based on its Scripture meaning and on the purpose of church assembly per Hebrews 10:24-5, that the latter should have preeminence in church assembly. We now turn to a sad situation common in our churches: use of assembly-only doctrines to justify disregard of all-week doctrine. James 3:17 says that the Christian's wisdom should be "pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (ESV). Despite this, 2 John is often used to justify deliberate mistreatment of people<sup>1n</sup> disagreed with over meeting-time religious tenets.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> People get very creative in coming up with bogus schemes for this aim.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 875.

<sup>2</sup> In Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 453.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 283 NT.

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

<sup>5</sup> Open Bible, page 1247.

<sup>6</sup> Funk, Hoover, et al, The Five Gospels, page 500.

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

<sup>8</sup> Westminster Study Bible, page 403 NT.

<sup>9</sup> KJV| McReynolds, Word Study Greek-English New Testament, page 874.

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

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

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

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

Topic #2 of 2: Authorized and Unauthorized Division

Christians have always been urged against division. The strongest command is at Romans 16:17b "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); "divisions" here is διχοστασια "standing apart."<sup>1</sup> These are acts of dissociation. What is interesting is that the passage says that such conduct is "contrary to what you have been taught." Even before this epistle was written, they had already been taught not to engage in acts of dissociation. We can conclude that this is a general principle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> This is **NOT** just any sin.

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



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

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

Topic #1 of 2: The Lesson of the Corinthians

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Disjoint from church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for 'disliked view' or 'religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."\* It also means "choosing."† This is intentional choice, not mistake. In the church, this is making factional parties of whatever type based upon chosen preference.

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

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

The fact that a copy of Scripture took months to years of labor made widespread availability of Scripture impossible. Common Christians then could not spend hours each day poring over private copies of Scripture<sup>1n</sup> to ensure that the finest details of their religious beliefs were absolutely in line with what was in Scripture. Large-scale absolute 'doctrinal correctness' was not possible.

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

### The Jerusalem Council Situation and Romans 12:1

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

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.<sup>4</sup> James said at Acts 15:19-20 "'So I think we should not bother the non-Jewish people who are turning to God. Instead, we should write a letter telling them these things: Stay away from food that has been offered to idols (which makes it unclean), any kind of sexual sin, eating animals that have been strangled, and blood'" (NCV). The letter was then started at Acts 15:23 "From the apostles, and elders" (NCV). Jewish-Christians continued to follow the Law of Moses. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "'Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses'" (NCV), and later "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV) at Acts 21:24. There continued to be differences in worship style among Christians even after the Jerusalem Council - with approval. It follows from this approved example that Christians can vary in worship-specific behavior.

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

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<sup>1</sup> As noted by numerous Orthodox and Catholic apologists, but for another reason.

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Noted in Lucado, The Inspirational Bible, page 1265.

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

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

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

Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). Note the "I **have taught** you"<sup>2n</sup> – He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. In His earthly ministry, Christ had preached mostly on our deeds in regular life.

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

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

The purpose of church meetings is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly and reiterated afterward: to encourage each other to live Christ-preached lives of love and good deeds.<sup>3n</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Any church congregation neglecting this purpose neglects its reason to exist.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

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

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

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

"The Same Mind" in Directions to Congregations

- "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be knit together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (ASV|BishB, GenB|ASV) – 1 Corinthians 1:10.
- "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (ASV) – 2 Corinthians 13:11.
- "make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (ASV) – Philippians 2:2.

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

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

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

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

The Effects of Division and What Jesus Christ Taught about Unity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was a wish of Jesus Christ - a dying wish as He was dying for us. Sadly, there are too many followers of His who *prefer* separation. Some acknowledge other Christians as Christians yet seek to stay aloof from them. Some church people diligently seek for reasons in some Christians to shun them as non-Christians<sup>2n</sup> entirely.<sup>3n</sup> All this is despite the fact that Jesus Christ was explicit about His will in this matter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them" (ASV).
- "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them" (ESV).
- "But I warn you, brothers, to keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, quite out of harmony with what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>5</sup> in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

<sup>7</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>8</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

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

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

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

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

These acts are **NOT** disagreement. The Greek words διακρισις and διαλογισμος referring to **thought open to question** at Romans 14:1<sup>5</sup> are not in Romans 16:17. Here are specifics of διακρισεις διαλογισμων at Romans 14:1-13a:

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

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

Therefore, when Romans 16:17 says "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, contrary to what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV), it was not condemning people having difference in thought. The Greek word translated "divisions" is διχοστασια "standing apart"<sup>6</sup> and describes *the act of dissociation/division itself*.

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

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God | may be complete, | entirely instructed for all good work."**<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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

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

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

<sup>10</sup> in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.



Titus 3:8-11

Discussion #1 of 2: Issues of Carnality

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

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

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

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

Topic #2 of 2: Greco-Roman Culture

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

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

Paul wrote of people behaving like the stereotypical Greco-Roman philosophers at 1 Timothy 1:3-7a

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

1 Timothy 6:3-4a clarifies further:

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, page 123-4.

<sup>4</sup> Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, page 124.

<sup>5</sup> A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>6</sup> Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

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

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

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

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

*The Nutshell*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

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

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

Local Situations: Colossae/Laodicea, Romans 14-16

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

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

The Smaller Affair: Instructions to Colossae and Laodicea

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The Larger Affair: A Problem at Rome*

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

We start at Romans 14:1-13a. Romans 14:1-13a says:

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

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

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

Romans 15:5-7 says:

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

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

Romans 16:17b gives more information: "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, [contrary to] what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV). Greek translated "divisions" is διχοστασια "standing apart."<sup>1</sup> These are acts of dissociation. People were causing these acts of dissociation.

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

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

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

As Romans 14:1-13a lists the religious disagreements, it says "Who art thou | to censure another's servant?" (ASV | NBV) at Romans 14:4. After accepting each side of the disagreement, and reminding everyone that we answer to the Lord, it says "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV) at Romans 14:13. Romans 15:7 directed them "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (NASB). Romans 16:17b directed "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV).

*Putting These Together*

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

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality" (ESV), has *διχοστασια*, and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV). The word *διχοστασια* is literally "standing apart."<sup>1</sup> We are warned that tendencies toward acts of disassociating are as much a part of our carnality as these other carnal lusts.

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

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

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

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

As Romans 14:1-13a lists religious disagreements, it says "Who art thou | to censure another's servant?" (ASV | NBV) at Romans 14:4. After accepting each side of the disagreement, and reminding everyone that we answer to the Lord, it says "let us no longer censure one another" (NBV) at Romans 14:13. Romans 15:7 directed them "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (NASB). Romans 16:17b directed "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV).

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

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

### Putting It All Together

James said of Gentiles and the Old Testament Judaic Law in Acts 15:19-20 "I think we should not bother the non-Jewish people who are turning to God. Instead, we should write a letter telling" (NCV). 15:23 starts the letter, but Jewish-Christians continued to follow the Law. At Acts 21:20 James said to Paul "Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have become believers. And they think it is very important to obey the law of Moses" (NCV), and at 21:24 "you follow the law of Moses in your own life" (NCV). There was approved difference in worship style among Christians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The purpose of church meetings is for Christians to encourage each other to live lives of love and doing good deeds; *a congregation's quality is how well it meets this divinely-appointed purpose.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

διχοστασια "standing apart"<sup>1</sup> appears at Galatians 5:20<sup>2</sup> in a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) started at Galatians 5:19. James 1:27 has "Pure religion and undefiled | in the sight of | our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (ASV|NBV|ASV); the Greek translated "religion" literally means "religious service,"<sup>3</sup> so "pure religious service" is to serve people and avoid sin that pervades the world outside assembly -- such as all those sins of Galatians 5:19-21, including διχοστασια "standing apart." James 1:27 "pure religious service" would include trying to remain "unspotted" from this sin. Per Hebrews 10:24-5, this is a GOD-ordained priority for congregations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

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

<sup>4</sup> Any congregation slighting this purpose fails at its task regardless of its tenets.

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

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

In ancient times, baptism was considered an initiation rite<sup>1n</sup> that identified already-done conversion<sup>2n</sup>; in Christianity, unlike among other ancient religions, all Christians had/have only one prescribed initiation rite, which is baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. This passage "Ephesians" 3:21-4:5 shows we are to glorify Christ by putting aside differences because we are all "one body" who ultimately identify of "one faith" to serve "one Lord" Jesus Christ. ■

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

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

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

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

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

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

Afterward, baptizing in water as an initiation rite<sup>2n</sup> to accompany conversion is left to mortals. Ephesians 3:3-9 refers to "mystery" (ASV) in Christianity. Mystery religions were about an entity who overcame death,\* as Christ did. The popular competing ancient mystery religion Mithraism had seven levels of initiation.\*\* They reflected rank and involved a water ceremony.^\* Christians have no such system; all Christians share one assigned water initiation rite<sup>2n</sup> and the same status.

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> For more on this, please see:

Part 4/*The Nature of the New Covenant*

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



## Part 6: Lessons of Scripture and the Later Church

### A Lesson from History

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

The decades c. 2000 are not the first thought of functional Christian unity. Isolated efforts for unity despite disagreement occurred in Europe in the 1600's,<sup>1</sup> such as the Collegiants of the 1600's and 1700's.<sup>2n</sup> The early 1800's eastern American frontier grew the Restoration<sup>3n</sup> that led to the Christian Connexion and the Disciples of Christ + Churches of Christ + Independent Christian churches.<sup>4n</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tucker, McAllister, Journey in Faith, pages 92-3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Restoration Movement had mottos like "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible" to restore New Testament-era congregation practice. Such efforts to do this using only Scripture were not unique to the Restoration Movement.

When the author of this study became a Christian, the Baptist congregation he attended had that aim. Assertions of 'Scripture as our sole authority' are as old as the Baptists; restoring New Testament-era Christianity was still a leading interest among Baptists in the 1800's.\* However, they and the Restorers did not agree on how.

Before the Restoration, John Glas and Robert Sandeman began a movement in Europe to operate churches by a New Testament pattern\*\* in the 1700's. Congregations of that movement in both Europe and North America commonly went by the name "Church of Christ."\*\* They required congregation meetings in this order: teaching, giving, Lord's Supper, and prayers -- thinking Acts 2:42 requires this order.\*\* They also did foot washing and the "holy kiss" greeting.\*\* Restoration leader A. Campbell refused the Sandemanian system because it had no unity impetus.^†

As stated above, some Baptists maintain restorationism, inherited from the Anabaptists who became widely-visible in the 1500's. Some 1800's Baptists opposed sermons prepared in advance.^† Other Anabaptist offshoots: Brethren groups. Among Brethren, a conviction "No creed but the New Testament" is common.† The Brethren began in the 1700's with a commitment to replicating life and ordinances of the New Testament-era church.† Mid-1800's Brethren practiced anointing the ill, the "holy kiss" greeting, and foot washing.† Some Brethren do communion celebrations with these three rites at one event: foot washing, love feast, Lord's Supper.† Baptists and Restoration groups normally do not wash feet. Brethren and Baptists see hosting Lord's Suppers infrequently as fine; all three Restoration groups believe in hosting Lord's Suppers weekly. 1800's Brethren had disputes when some built raised platforms for speakers†† and a hymnbook with melodies appeared.†† In the 1800's there was dispute of Brethren versus Restorers about whether or not the Lord's Supper was restricted to nights, and in baptism whether to dip thrice or once and forward-only or not.\*†

Among the restoration-seeking groups, there has never been agreement as to what Scripture teaches regarding what to do as congregations. The reason is the scant attention paid to congregation proceedings by the Lord in His written Word.

The Brethren, with a restoration-seeking nature overall, began cooperative efforts with other church groups in the 1900's.† Many others should do the same.

\* McAllister, Tucker, Journey in Faith, page 139.

\*\* Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 37-8.

^† Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 50.

^† McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, page 373.

† Bowman, Brethren Society, pages 357, 4-5, 74, 361-2 respectively.

† In Durnbaugh, Church of the Brethren, page 49.

†† Brown, Simulations on Brethren History, page 25 and similar pages in a theme.

††† Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren, page 311.

\*† In Casey, Foster, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 336.

<sup>2</sup> John Mark Hicks's contribution in Baker, Evangelicalism & the Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 95-6.

<sup>3</sup> Many people in forerunner groups and in the Restoration have assumed that Scripture has for a primary purpose 'church assembly handbook.' This lead to strange disputes. Among the Haldaneans there was this polite dispute: whether to start meetings with prayer or hymn.\* Passages: 1 Timothy 2:14 "First of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks" versus "Enter into his courts with praise" Psalm 100:4.\* Neither passage addressed congregation assembly. Haldaneans helped ministers of any denomination and mitigated bitter feelings between denominations\*\* common then.

\* Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, pages 52-3.

\*\* Casey, Foster essay in Casey, Foster The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 33.

Christians regardless of denomination.<sup>1</sup> The Haldaneans planned to not be a new denomination and associated with Congregationalists, but split away.<sup>2</sup> The Haldaneans were not the only predecessors.

The Restoration<sup>3n</sup> goal: to forsake denomination distinctives and loyalties, and pattern congregations per the New Testament and that only,<sup>4n</sup> as a means of facilitating goodwill and unity to serve the Lord as just Christians like in the New Testament.<sup>5n</sup> Restoration obstacles included

- scant information was accessible then to understand the Scriptures in the ways that New Testament-era readers/hearers would have understood Scripture's texts at their time and in their part of the world;
- many Christians did not see substantial merit to 'doing church' in any of the ways from nearly 2000 years past and across an ocean away, and many Restorers refused to be non-factious over this disagreement;
- assumption that the New Testament-era church was denomination-like with a sizable set of religious tenets and common practices, and that the New Testament had 'congregation handbook' as a primary purpose;
- it was still assumed that Christian unity depended on agreement over congregations' separate meetings;
- factiousness and lack of humility: many saw no need for life-long study of Scripture to learn nor difference between what Scripture says versus their inferences, and were insistent upon being agreed with.

These problems were worsened by people who neglected unity to focus exclusively on primitivism.<sup>6n</sup>

The first problem caused many to have bad disagreements with the rest of the church. 1800's American frontier Christians usually had only the King James Version 1769 edition. Unaware of factors regarding translation, many thought what it said was exactly and simply what New Testament-era Christians would have read/heard. They also commonly assumed that how 1800's Americans would perceive a statement in normal conversation is exactly how ancient New Testament-era people across the planet would have understood it. The masses did not know that these were not always so - resulting in bad inferences of Scripture that are still a problem as of c. 2000.

The second and third problems came from thought like 'That was nearly 2000 years ago; there is no reason to do that now.' Scripture never indicates a uniform congregation pattern extant,<sup>7</sup> let alone taught; to the contrary, 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 and 14:40 told a chaotic congregation to arrange an order and introduced guidelines, as it appears congregations were commonly expected to arrange orders without such guidance. Also, Scripture, which per 2 Timothy 3:16-7 is a "person who serves

<sup>1</sup> Toulouse, Joined in Discipleship, pages 27, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, page 17.

<sup>3</sup> An early event of the Restoration was an 1801 camp meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists got together and preached.\* Military personnel estimated that 20,000 to 30,000 people attended.\*\* This meeting and other meetings like it were reported to have changed the moral character of Kentucky and Tennessee.\*\* When Christians urge people to live godly lives for Christ as Matthew 28:19-20 told us to do, and work together focused on that aim, great things can happen.

\* Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

\*\* B. W. Stone, Rogers, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, page 37.

^\* Vos, Exploring Church History, page 135.

<sup>4</sup> In Scripture, a Christian is simply a follower of Jesus Christ, and a congregation simply an assembly of them. See Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church" for details.

Not all congregations operate in New Testament-era ways, but biblically **church congregations are made by people, not happenings**. Boasting against others of being 'New Testament this-or-that' based on congregation events is not warranted.

<sup>5</sup> In the New Testament, being a follower of Christ was enough for truly unmitigated congregation standing -- all privileges available. At some places that boast of being 'New Testament churches' against other Christians, the Christian has been 'expected' to adopt additional religious tenets for the Christian to be 'fully acceptable.'

Given the Bible meaning of "church," one would think correctively 'restoring' this would be seen as important. It should be enough to just be a follower of Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Restorationism and unity are not mutually exclusive. As Jesus Christ's apostles oversaw New Testament-era congregations, there is great merit to adhering to their common practices -- but **there is no merit to factiousness against Christians not convinced to this ideal**.

<sup>7</sup> Noted by Stephen J. England, quoted by Ralph G. Wilburn in his article in Blakemore, The Renewal of Church (ed. Osborne, Volume 1 Renewal of Tradition), page 1:221.

God" (ICB) 'handbook,' has scant hints on any congregation's assembly proceedings; there are not enough hints to sketch without human conjectures even one New Testament-era meeting at one congregation from start to finish. Many outside the Restoration knew there was no Bible-ordained congregation pattern, and were not convinced to reinstate in their congregations even common practices of the New Testament era. Many Restorers became factious against those congregations.

The fourth and third problems came from before the Restoration. As of c. 2000, many denominations are just associations of congregations. This was not so when the Restoration began. Denominations tended toward ill-will and aggressive hostilities<sup>1</sup> due to disagreements.<sup>2n</sup> Many people thought that precepts, rather than followers of Christ, make churches. Restorers often saw unity as dependent on congregations agreeing on a New Testament-like state and going to it.<sup>3n</sup> Unity of Christians was seen as dependent on congregations, rather than on personal Christian effort.<sup>4n</sup>

The fifth problem possibly harmed the Restoration most. Many saw no distinction between 'This Scripture passage says' versus 'I say this Scripture passage teaches such-and-such.' They lacked humility to accept that they had opinions, or that their 'The Bible teaches' ideas may be wrong. Many also lacked humility to see a lifelong need to study Scripture to learn; the 1830's began an upsurge of people who forsook such efforts and focused instead on defending "gains of the past"<sup>5</sup> whether valid or not. There was little-to-no willingness to reconsider<sup>6n</sup> any such alleged "gains of the past."<sup>7n</sup> Many factious agreement-fixated people switching group allegiance to the Restoration did not repent; they just changed to insisting that everyone 'do church the New Testament way' - their opinions on that, of course - and held church unity conditional on that.<sup>8n</sup> When non-Restoration groups did not do what they saw no merit to, and/or did not adopt 'enough' of many Restorers' errors which those Restorers would not re-examine,<sup>9n</sup> conditions for unity satisfactory to many Restorers did not exist.

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, How the Disciples Began and Grew, page 16.

<sup>2</sup> Tragically, some parts of the Restoration remain this way as of two centuries later, while most of the church has left behind this high level of acrimony.

<sup>3</sup> Even as of c.2000, factious Restorationists view the calls of Scripture away from division and toward unity as commands for 'everyone else' to join their groups.

<sup>4</sup> A contributing problem in the Restoration is a common adherence to an 1800's idea of church unity: union of all church congregations into one church group. The Churches of Christ/Independent Christian churches suffer from this, as does the Disciples of Christ General Manifestation. The former usually try to get all Christians to join their group/s; the latter attempts mergers. That 1800's model should be discarded.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Hughes's contribution to Dunnivant, et al, Founding Vocation & Future Vision, pages 59, 61-62.

<sup>6</sup> Some members of these groups truly think they would reconsider anything when really they would not. Many get convinced to see some group precepts as 'settled' and cannot imagine them wrong. Some have a lot of trust in their group, and cannot imagine their group being wrong. Some have a lot of loyalty for their group and its heritage, and feel it their duty to affirm the rightness of their group and its heritage. Whether for these reasons or others, they cannot fully consider objections to some precepts.

<sup>7</sup> This is why 'study with' sessions by Church of Christ promoters are often not 'study with.' Often, it is only one way: Church of Christ promoters tell outsiders what they 'should' think Scripture teaches, but expect to learn nothing from outsiders.

It is common in the Churches of Christ to assume that they are the only group whose people have studied Scripture on their own to learn what it teaches. Of course, this is not a valid assumption.

Another common Church of Christ assumption is that if they can seem skillful in tactics of debate and other efforts to look 'better than everyone else,' the views they hold are true. This assumption is also invalid; tactics do not determine truth.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Campbell, after detecting the growth of exclusivism in the Restoration movement, mellowed his attacks on other church groups, and tried to counterbalance those growing tendencies -- Knowles, In Pursuit of the True Church, page 237.

<sup>9</sup> Insisting these are 'clear teachings of Scripture' does not make them teachings of Scripture at all.

*Perhaps the best thing the Restoration did was restore heed to New Testament precepts that acts of dividing are carnal sin to shun. There were serious failures to rightly follow these teachings,<sup>1n</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> We will start with the oldest such error: opposition to open membership. Open membership is congregations not creating a division to exclude Christians who are not properly baptized. The first congregations of the Restoration accepted unimmersed Christians into membership.\* Some of those congregations even had people who held the Quaker view and had never had any water ceremony at all.\*\* The early and influential Brush Run Church did not require immersion for membership from 1811 until changing in June 1812.^\* Many early congregations refused to abandon the older practice and make any such change.\*\* By c. 2000, open membership had become common again.

Acts meticulously records Christian baptism, and none for Apollos; the example of Apollos in Acts 18:24-8 shows that baptism as a Christian is not a must-have for acceptance by the church. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44<sup>†</sup> and "believers" (NASB) in such places as Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7 and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe those in Christ's church. Scripture has "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB): μαθητας "disciples" is plural for Greek meaning "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>††</sup> Even if such a person fails to be properly baptized, s/he is a Christian. Open membership is a simple matter: any congregation of the Lord's church is within the Lord's church, and the Lord's church is His -- not ours. It is sheer presumption for any mortal to think s/he can refuse a Christian a place in any congregation of the Lord's church.

Before we go on, factious Restorationists redefine "denomination" as 'group we disagree with,' and use "denominationalism" as a self-excusing replacement for 'being factious.' Non-factious associations of congregations are not addressed in Scripture. Factiousness against Christians is addressed -- negatively. Opinions on what Scripture does not address should not 'trump' Scripture's mandates on what it does address.

Factious Restoration groups often want to stay separate, and have others join them. Our first illustration, coming from the Churches of Christ:

"Unless the church of Christ is different from all other religious institutions it has no lawful right to exist as a separate body. Unless these differences are necessary, and unless they can be found collected in no other body, we likewise have no right to exist."<sup>†††</sup>

There are many people who study Scripture with a primary aim of defending their group's existence as a faction. Of course, even if the group could be shown wrong on something, it would not mean that the group must disband as an association of congregations. Match the quoted statement with "the movement has pleaded with denominationalists to meet us at the feet of the Lord and his apostles."<sup>††</sup> Someone in the Churches of Christ/Independent Christian churches described

"the liberating sense of freedom I received in a class taught by Professor Woodrow Phillips at Ozark Christian College many years ago. He said, 'Suppose I find some church down the street practicing something that we had not been doing, but that the Bible clearly commands. If that happened, I would not leave the Christian Church and go join *that* congregation. I would stay where I am and just start practicing the new truth I had learned from God's Word.'

That's it in a nutshell"

but wrote "we gladly welcome into the membership of our churches other penitent immersed believers who want to unite with us."<sup>††</sup> This idea is common: 'We are not going anywhere, but we encourage others to join us, provided we find them acceptable.'

In Scripture, commands against factiousness and to strive for unity were to the whole church. It is common for factious Restoration groups to see these commands as applying to 'everyone else' and to see themselves as exempt from these commands.

\* DeGroot, New Possibilities for Disciples and Independents, pages 34-5.

\*\* Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, pages 119 and 120.

^\* Belcastro, The Relationship of Baptism to Church Membership, page 22.

† Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 104.

†† Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

††† Gayle Oler quoted by Foster, Will the Cycle Be Unbroken?, page 60.

\*† Ford, A History of the Restoration Plea, page 173.

\*†† S. E. Stone, Simply Christians, pages 42 and 54 respectively.

but heed to these teachings has been restored. The New Testament-era church shows no sign of a large set of agreed-on distinctly-religious tenets. Scripture reflects no interest in such<sup>1n</sup>; 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-9 say to "shun foolish questionings" (ASV) unrelated to "good deeds" and "godly life" (NLT 1996). Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχοστασια "standing apart" <sup>2</sup> and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Romans 14 shows that New Testament-era Christians were not expected to agree on religious details, so differing thought was irrelevant to unity in the New Testament-era church.<sup>3n</sup> The Restoration did well to bring people's attention to Scripture's teachings to strive for unity in the church even as the groups had failures to apply them rightly.<sup>4n</sup>

As non-Restoration denominations did not join the Restoration, factious men took over parts of it. Factious people fixated on group agreement have great trouble serving the Lord with any whom they disagree with; to them, such is unimaginable to utterly repulsive. When disagreement exists, factious people see it as reason to divide, and do so - and blame others for the division.

<sup>1</sup> That is why many modern disputes remain unresolved; the New Testament reflects neither existence of nor commonly-held views on them then -- **nor concern for answering them.**

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> The Disciples of Christ part of the Restoration body has restored this.

<sup>4</sup> We have discussed failures of heavily factious portions, but some in the Disciples of Christ have done poorly too. The 1960's Restructure created the General and Regional Manifestations from agencies that before were subject to the congregations. In the 1960's a leader of one of those agencies, the International Convention, said:

"`We must have an organization that can move together if we are to have an effective witness. This needs to be achieved, even if it means a breaking away of the anti-organization wing of the Christian Churches, a possible loss of 2,700 churches and 650,000 members."\*

1967 membership was 1.9 million\*\* so this was over one-third. To this person, this agency, which was set up to serve the congregations, merited having his interests for its "witness" put above them. This was while the General Manifestation was being made!

After Restructure, the General Manifestation ceased to be forthcoming on their activities for their own ideas of `witness' -- which have often been at much discord with Scripture. "`At least we are not fundamentalists'" appeared as a notable excuse for ineptness with the Bible,^\* and knowledge of the Bible was attributed negative stereotypes.^\* In 1975, the General Manifestation passed a resolution opposing capital punishment<sup>†</sup> -- despite that Romans 13:1-5 says civil government was "ordained of God" to bear "the sword" against those who "doeth evil" (ASV). They also passed a resolution urging no judgment on the wrongness of killing unborn children<sup>†</sup> -- despite that Christ Himself placed "murders" among "evil things" (ASV) at Mark 7:21-3!

Congregations have had problems with the General Manifestation's caricatures of the whole denomination as being `on board' with such things. Some congregations leave to protest, but others to get relief. This denomination was one of the fastest declining denominations as of 1994.^† While denomination leadership seeks `union' and `partnership' with other left-wing highly-political denomination leaderships, as of c. 2000 no such effort exists to maintain union within their own denomination. To the contrary, the General Manifestation has Resolution 9516 where *they* "remove" congregations for not replying to them<sup>††</sup>! The `unity effort' is a selective farce.

Men such as D. Newell Williams have insisted that the liberals must start listening to the conservatives, and urged academicians to be less aloof from the congregations<sup>†</sup> -- both of which say a lot about the General Manifestation's long-time attitudes. 1 Corinthians 12 urges us to value everyone in the church; Disciples leadership has not done so even in their own denomination.

\* Loren E. Lair quoted by Murch, The Free Church, page 112.

\*\* Harvey, Setting Disciples Free, page 67.

^\* Boring, Disciples and the Bible, pages 426 and 449 respectively.

† Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, pages 52 and 51-52 respectively.

^† Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, page 64.

† Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 520.

†† Hamm, 2020 Vision, page 124.

Those in the Restoration generally called themselves "Christians" or "Disciples." A quarrel in the large Restoration body<sup>1n</sup> was on musical instruments in assembly.<sup>2n</sup> God invites such from "everything that hath breath" (ASV) at Psalm 150, but some add a ban on it because most of the New Testament<sup>3n</sup> never mentions it<sup>4n</sup> explicitly.<sup>5n</sup> Anti-instrumentalist Daniel Sommer predicted a split and wrote "Hallelujah" in 1889.<sup>6</sup> Several people asked the 1906 United States census officials to list them distinct from the rest of the movement.<sup>7</sup> David Lipscomb, a group leader, informed the director of the 1906 U. S. census that his group was disparate,<sup>8</sup> already had a list made with a partner,<sup>9</sup> and initiated a formal split from the rest of the movement<sup>10n</sup> as a separate group of Churches of Christ.<sup>11n</sup>

Throughout the late 1800's and the early 1900's, Restoration congregations outside of the adamantly non-instrumental stripe published a *Year Book* in which their congregations were listed.

<sup>1</sup> The Christian Connection was not in this.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional church musical instruments were a commodity on the American frontier and many church persons came to disdain them.\* Successors of them have tried to misuse 'weak faith' Scripture verses, claiming that actions Scripture permits should be banned to not 'offend' the 'weaker brother.' 1 Corinthians 8 shows it is good to refrain from biblically-permitted acts to not get a "weak" Christian to do something s/he thinks s/he should not do -- while s/he grows toward "knowledge" (ASV).

These modern 'weak brethren' intend their 'weakness' to be permanent and spread to others. This is unacceptable; in Scripture, 'weakness' is to be matured out of.

Still, some congregations wanting to use musical instruments may need mixed song time: some songs sung with accompaniment, and some not. People present would decide whether to sing or refrain on each song as comfortable.

\* J. North, Union in Truth, pages 221-3 and 248-9.

<sup>3</sup> New Testament-era Revelation 5:8-14 reports John present with πρεσβυτεροι "elders" = congregation leaders "each holding a harp" (ESV) as they "sing" (ASV) to the Lord. It is unrealistic to think "sing" means the harps were not used for their purpose.

<sup>4</sup> The New Testament NEVER mentions special trained song-leaders to replace this, Bibles divided into verses with verse numbers added, or led prayer whatever term is used. Among such groups, the silence ban is invoked inconsistently and selectively.

Non-mention does not always forbid, nor always permit; non-mention sometimes means neither of these and can mean something else -- and often means nothing at all.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 13, 14, 17, and 18 report Christians participating in synagogue worship, and synagogues had shofars, a type of horn.\* Acts 2:46 reports Christians "day by day, attending the temple together" (ESV); daily temple services had choirs singing with instrumental accompaniment.\*\* The instruments were a trivial detail unworthy of note.

\* Archaeological Study Bible, page 1783.

\*\* Punton, The World Jesus Knew, pages 124-5.

<sup>6</sup> Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 392.

<sup>7</sup> DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, pages 151-2.

<sup>8</sup> J. North, Union in Truth, page 251.

<sup>9</sup> Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 400.

<sup>10</sup> Foy Wallace's legacy was 'fanning flames' of Church of Christ fights. Later, he came to deny merit of these fights, but many younger people took up fights he forsook.\*

Many people love contentions so much that they would reject the matured wisdom of people who left behind divisiveness after years of it. Let us beware of that.

\* Harrell, The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century, pages 177-8.

<sup>11</sup> The name is reflective of these groups' usual focus on group matters, rather than on individual following. A fixation on 'worship group'-related matters led to "Churches of Christ" whose prominent people serve their own interests as a 'worship group,' and have no real qualms disregarding Christ's ways to promote them. Such "Churches of Christ" must be distinguished from real Church of Christ congregations.

There are Christians among them, but Matthew 18:20 "two or three are gathered in my name" (ESV) does not apply; in ancient times, a person's name summed up the whole person,\* so groups not gathered for what Christ's Name is about do not meet in His Name.

THERE IS NO POINT IN TRYING TO IMITATE 'THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT' DURING MEETING TIME  
IF THE PERSON DOES NOT FOLLOW THE JESUS CHRIST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

\*in Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1519.

Many of those also participated in cooperative ventures. In the 1960's, the Christians/Disciples did a major Restructure to make cooperative activity and unity ventures more efficient.<sup>1n</sup> After Restructure was finished in 1968, thousands of congregations requested withdrawal from the *Year Book*,<sup>2</sup> starting

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<sup>1</sup> Irresponsibility with personal opinions has since hampered both greatly. Disciples denomination leaders often make needless expressions of personal political-social and theological liberalism by way of denomination business. This diverts denomination resources off-task to personal secular agendas, puts a rift in efforts of the overall denomination, harmfully misrepresents Disciples as a whole, alienates would-have-been members, and hurts biblical conservative groups' receptiveness to Disciples as a whole.

Fortunately, congregations are autonomous and members are not pressed to agree. Sadly, the Disciples of Christ were one of the fastest declining denominations as of 1994,\* and I see eight big causes. **First**, evangelism is sometimes devalued, which results in fewer new Christians. **Second**, many people have no concept of denominations that do not expect agreement. They wrongly think that radically-liberal theological and socio-political statements by non-laity are 'expected' party-line belief and shared by most Disciples. They think that they and the Disciples would be a bad fit.

**Third**, more-conservative denominations seem to have more consistent church attendance. A likely reason for this is belief in the Bible's directive to assemble at Hebrews 10:24-5; if the Bible is not always to be believed, as liberals hold, then church assembly will not always be seen as necessary. **Fourth**, because Christians who make church attendance a priority are often Bible believers, they prefer primary guidance for Christian living exclusively from God's written Word, rather than Scripture mixed with non-Scripture opinions. **Fifth**, the General Manifestation is not always quick to stand for believing what the Bible says, and too often does not. However, they often refuse to stay out of secular socio-political controversies that good Christians disagree over; they are often quick to take sides, and take the denomination with them -- including disagreeing majorities. Christians most likely to make church attendance a priority are biblical conservatives; they would want to support the church in work which Christ preached in the Bible, such as evangelism and simple benevolence -- NOT see praising reports of taking sides in dubious secular socio-political controversies, secular activism, and related criminal activity.

**Sixth**, some members seek relief from being suspected of supporting these excesses. **Seventh**, some members seek relief from feeling like they are supporting these excesses. **Eighth**, many Disciples of Christ leaders push crossways with the denomination's base. The Restoration Movement was steeped in Bible belief, and before Restructure, the Disciples and Independent Christians were the same denomination; Christians with similar views on reliability/authority of Scripture and church work priorities made the constituency of Disciples of Christ congregations. However, denomination leadership has sought most in common with heavily-liberal denominations such as the United Church of Christ. Disciples denomination leadership has often 'under-respected' the sentiments of the Disciples' heritage constituents, and it is destroying the denomination -- and thereby a witness to biblical unity.

Disciples denomination leaders have tended to needlessly alienate biblically conservative Disciples to the point that whole congregations withdraw. They do not even keep their denomination together. They are working against biblical unity.

**Whatever is claimed, 'off the wall' statements and actions by denomination leaders can typically be disregarded as NOT representative of a sizable-to-majority portion of the Disciples of Christ** -- leaders are not proactive in even informing the latter. Jesus Christ taught at Matthew 20:25-6

"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. |But it should not be that way among you.| Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant'" (NASB|ICB|TNIV).

Christian unity would be better promoted if denomination leaders would stop pushing their own agendas and instead be servant-leaders per Christ's teaching.

If denomination leaders would not claim that their personal opinions are 'the position of the Disciples of Christ,' it would help. Also prospectively helpful: not misappropriating denomination resources, time, and name for personal agendas. This denomination is a portion of the LORD's church, and leaders should treat it so.

\* Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, page 64.

<sup>2</sup> J. North, Union in Truth, page 345.



another split from the larger original strand of the Restoration. Some such congregations were not participating before then, but some had been. Many requests were caused by a misinformation campaign by "independents"<sup>1n</sup> that involved mailings with withdrawal forms and letters claiming falsely that Restructure threatened congregations' freedoms and property, and upon correction some congregations reversed their withdrawals.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, a common concern among withdrawing congregations was proactiveness on unity; they feared the others would get them involved indirectly with groups that they wanted no involvement with.<sup>3</sup> After Restructure, the Independent Christians 'fizzled' off,<sup>4n</sup> and the Disciples of Christ<sup>5n</sup> overall<sup>6n</sup> continued onward pushing biblical unity.<sup>7n</sup>

<sup>1</sup> People that stayed well-informed about the Restructure did not share this confusion and opposed little of what was going on.\* History is full of schemes like the above. Many "independents" refrained from joint ventures, and were not content to do so just for themselves -- they would try to hinder joint efforts and get others to do the same.

\*Tucker, McAllister, Journey in Faith, page 444.

<sup>2</sup> Teegarden, We Call Ourselves Disciples, page 25.

<sup>3</sup> J. North, Union in Truth, page 344.

<sup>4</sup> Oddly enough, many Independent Christians hold that the Disciples split from *them!*

<sup>5</sup> The Disciples of Christ denomination is **NOT** hierarchical; in the United States and Canada it has three areas: local congregation, Regional Manifestation, General Manifestation. Each congregation freely runs its own affairs, and each Manifestation is independent of each other and the congregations.\* The Regional Manifestation coordinates filling local needs beyond scopes of local congregations. The General Manifestation is to oversee denomination-wide cooperative efforts, make statements on social concerns, and coordinate relations with other religious groups.\*

Denomination leaders are often unwilling to keep their own personal opinions just personal, portraying them as 'the position of the Disciples of Christ.' This includes personal opinions which deny that what the Bible says is indisputably true, or which discord with Scripture. This also includes personal opinions in secular socio-political controversies where who is 'in the right' is reasonably debatable -- matters in which the denomination has no real business, should not meddle, and should not be dragged into. Most active attention of the General Manifestation has been in world affairs,\*\* which shows their overall greater interest in things of the world.

Fortunately, due to congregation autonomy, the General Manifestation rarely affects Disciples -- and even then, it is usually only annoyance or embarrassment.

The departure of many conservative congregations helped skeptics of Scripture and non-Christian 'religious' secular activists get easier influence in this church group. This is another illustration of the harm of dividing due to disagreement.

\* Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, page 64.

\*\* Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, page 53.

<sup>6</sup> Contrary to what some think, restorationism and church unity are NOT contradictory or mutually exclusive. An example of this type of claim is this one about the early 1800's Disciples by a 1987 Disciple: "They were naive in seeking to unite Christ's broken church on the basis of New Testament Christianity."\* This is not correct.

The only Christianity is New Testament Christianity, because the New Testament tells us what is involved with being a Christian. What went wrong was a large-scale failure to understand New Testament Christianity. Christianity is not affairs of church congregations. In Scripture, being Christian is simply being a follower of Christ's teachings. If Christians would simply take the Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian," base their understanding of Christianity on it, and extend that to congregations and intercongregational relations, biblical church unity would follow.

\* Cartwright, People of the Chalice, page 110.

<sup>7</sup> 1992 data reports 48% of Disciples believing in inerrancy of the Bible\* -- nearly half. Disciples of Christ are commonly more biblical than how they are portrayed by denominational leadership, as is often true in denominations with liberal reputations.

To seek church unity, Disciples denomination leaders try organizational administrative gestures with organization leaders of other denominations. In contrast, many Disciples use the Bible way to church unity: Christ's servants making a collective mutually-supportive effort to follow Jesus Christ's teachings together.

\* Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 503, 522.

Since Restructure, the Disciples of Christ have had an organizational model that has hurt the denomination as a whole.<sup>1n</sup> However, many congregations and individuals continue to do well serving in biblical unity. They simply serve with other Christians regardless of religious agreement.

<sup>1</sup> C. 2000 denomination leaders of the Disciples of Christ commonly have agendas very disparate from those of many Disciples. The most attention of the General Manifestation has been in world affairs,\* showing overall greater interest in things of the world.

We note a primary source.\*\* In 1988, a "Churchwide Planning Conference" wrote a booklet of "Needs and Suggested Actions" -- and in the "Mission" section we see "Objective: To involve persons in all congregations in significant mission, so that

1. the needs of those in the margins of society are met;
2. unjust or oppressive social structures are transformed; and
3. these actions lead to even wider involvement, both numerically and ecumenically."\*\*

I edited nothing out; there is no mention of Jesus Christ in this "Objective" of "Mission." These are good concerns -- but a church organization should include in its "mission" something about serving Jesus Christ and His teachings.

Disciples denomination leaders are sometimes unbelievers who only 'esteem' Jesus. They are often more interested in radically left-wing socio-political activity and related expressions of theological liberalism than in priorities Christ stated for His church. Often, they even go against what is known to be stated in Scripture.

The General and Regional Manifestations were Restructured from agencies formerly subject to congregations. The General Manifestation and Regional Manifestation do not have authority over the affairs of congregations; congregations are entirely free to disregard any input from those Manifestations, and often do. These Manifestations normally do not affect Disciples except for perhaps aggravation and/or embarrassment. Unfortunately, the Manifestations are also independent of the congregations.

The Disciples of Christ grew 71% from 1900-1950.<sup>†</sup> 1960 statistics show growth from 1832 until 1960, at 1.8 million.<sup>††</sup> In 1967, the year before Restructure was finished, they reached 1.9 million, and from then to 2001 there was a 57% decline.<sup>†††</sup>

Denomination leaders' excesses alienate many people and congregations to the point of leaving. Denomination leaders waste resources on administrative wrangling with some other denominations for "union," but do not do much to keep their own denomination together. This shows that their efforts in Christian unity are a farce.

As things are, the Disciples of Christ will diminish into even less relevance. It may dwindle away, or collapse and be replaced by another system. The former would be tragic. This church group offers common belief in unconditional, prompt, proper baptism of converts, while refraining from factiousness common in other Restoration groups. If the denomination folds and presents an opening for a better system, the potential for good influence correlates to how many conservative congregations remain.

As for denomination leadership's antics, Jesus Christ taught at Matthew 20:25-6 "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. |But it should not be that way among you.| Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant'" (NASB|ICB|TNIV).

Christian unity would be better promoted if denomination leaders would stop pushing their own agendas and instead be servant-leaders per Christ's teaching.

This denomination is part of the **LORD's** church, and leaders should treat it so. Its leaders should lead this part of the Lord's church to fulfill what He stated He wants His followers to do -- they should not set aside those priorities, and should not misappropriate the denomination's resources and name for personal agendas. There will be a time when bad leaders can no longer spurn Bible-following servants of Christ. This will either happen in their lifetimes, or afterward. If the unbelievers do not repent of hijacking this portion of the Lord's church for their misuse as a far-left political group, they will likely cower before an angry Lord Jesus Christ.

What those people do is ultimately their problem. Let the majority Christians within the Disciples of Christ continue to serve Jesus Christ faithfully therein.

\* Cummins, A Handbook for Today's Disciples, page 53.

\*\* Churchwide Planning Conference, Dynamic Faith Communities, page 31.

† A. T. DeGroot's article in Loetscher, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, page 1:340.

†† A. T. DeGroot's article in Pugh, Primer for New Disciples, page 86.

††† Harvey, Setting Disciples Free, page 67.

Since Restructure, Churches of Christ have had partial 'reunion' with Independent Christians. The main premise has been mutually-acceptable agreement on religious tenets, rather than Scripture's terms. In c. 2000, talk urging unity is common among them - as is avoiding or resisting meaningful action with groups they disagree with; of three U.S. Restoration groups, two remain mostly factious.<sup>1n</sup>

History has a unity movement that resulted in two denominations with substantial portions of their congregations being among the most divisive as of c. 2000.<sup>2n</sup> Something went wrong in the United States Restoration movement.<sup>3n</sup> The Bible can show us what went wrong if we will heed.

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<sup>1</sup> To their credit, there are persons and even whole congregations among the Churches of Christ + Independent Christian churches that are straining to leave this legacy of factiousness. Small portions have drawn down barriers against other Christian groups. Degrees vary, and resistance fierce, but as of c.2000, it is slowly happening.

Also to their credit, both the Churches of Christ and Independent Christians still talk rightly about biblical authority. If Bible belief would be paired with accurate Bible teaching on divisiveness and unity, biblical unity could erupt.

<sup>2</sup> The Restoration fared even worse in Canada. Its roots were the U.S. Restoration and a similar movement in Europe.\* At first, the movement in Canada was growing faster than in the U.S. but was joined by many Scotch Baptists, who were highly agreement-insistent.\*\* Due to internal fighting and separation by long distances, Restoration groups in Canada totaled only about 110 congregations in the late 1900's.\*\*

Let us consider U.S. parallels. On one end is the Disciples of Christ, one of the fastest declining denominations as of 1994.<sup>†</sup> A big reason is denominational leaders asserting personal opinions as 'The position of the Disciples of Christ.' They are unwilling to let their personal opinions remain just that, and label other people with those opinions against their will, prompting some withdrawals. It is regrettable that many Disciples congregations let the General Manifestation's irresponsibility influence them to leave, but it happens. They join the Independent Christian churches and associated Churches of Christ, and face more risk of influence from factious people in those groups. On the other end, in the mid-1900's, the argument-racked Churches of Christ showed more attention to details of religious tenets than morals/ethics, and many people left.<sup>††</sup> A later study of them found 'accept versus be critical of' those who differ to be linked to church growth versus decline.<sup>‡</sup>

Romans 14:1-13a shows how New Testament-era Christians had differing views on religious details, and allows this status. Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, |contrary to| what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."<sup>††</sup> Christians were taught not to engage in acts of dividing. Christians were expected to not agree and yet refrain from acts of dividing. When church people insist on pressing their views onto other people in the church, they depart from the Bible way, and unsurprisingly the results are not good.

\* in Matlins, Magida, How to Be a Perfect Stranger, page 58.

\*\* Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 293 and 296 respectively.

† Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, page 64.

†† Hughes, Roberts, The Churches of Christ, page 145.

‡ Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches, pages 32, 122.

†† Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT;

in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> New Zealand and Australia fared better as of the late 1900's: there was growth in the movement, with no Disciples/Independents distinction in either country.\* Despite firm commitment to proper baptism, they participate in ecumenical activities with non-immersion groups.\*\* In New Zealand, liberals and conservatives accommodate each other in one fellowship,\* and in Australia, non-Charismatics and Charismatics came to tolerate each other.^\* Scripture teaches Christians to accommodate each other in disagreement, and the Restoration there has done so. Just like the New Testament-era church, it is growing. Unsurprisingly, Bible ways and Bible results occur together.

\* Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 302.

\*\* Childers, et al, The Crux of the Matter, page 123.

^\* Graeme Chapman's contribution in Foster et al, The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, page 52.

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχοστασια, and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV); διχοστασια means "standing apart."<sup>1</sup> Divisive tendencies are just like tendencies to those other much-disdained sins listed in the passage. When people are not attentive to these fleshly tendencies, sin comes unnoticed.<sup>2n</sup> It has happened before.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>2</sup> Here we will discuss a case study of what happens when factiousness runs its full course to an extreme. We will discuss radical "Churches of Christ" led by people more interested in their institution than in Christ. I hold these as distinct from legitimate Churches of Christ. We will use Denominationalism Versus the Bible.

We see this in the Forward: "THE BIBLE ONLY MAKES CHRISTIANS ONLY AND THE ONLY CHRISTIANS."\* We find a chart "Sound Doctrine" with headings "WE SHOULD NOT SAY" and "WE SHOULD SAY" and therein we have "1. `Church of Christ **people**`" faced by "`Christians, God's children" to replace it. We also see "13. `Church of Christ Church`" faced by "`church of Christ, the Lord's church`" to replace it. Further, see "10. `quitting the Church`" faced by "`Quitting the Lord`" to replace it.\*\*

They assert that only those within the self-named "Churches of Christ" are Christians. To them, to not be involved in their institution is to not serve Christ.

"Parents should not want their children to have the impression that a `good Methodist` is good because he is a Methodist. The Methodist is good to the degree that he has learned and applied Christ's doctrine to his life"^^ but to them, s/he is not a Christian. This is wrong. Acts 11:26 "the |followers| were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB|ICB|NASB); μαθητας is plural for "one who follows one's teachings"^^ -- ANY person who learns and follows Christ's teachings is a Christian.

To many ultra-factionists, whom they are not is very important to them. We see a poem "I am a Christian" with ten "but I am not..." verses that refer to select denominations by name and ends "By the grace of God, I am a Christian."† Who the person is not is the focus of that poet's attention. Such persons are not `Christian only,` but rather are `Christian and not...' Christians truly `Christian only` focus mainly on their identities as followers of Jesus Christ -- not who they are against.

When people have their religious interests centered on the group they are part of, their religious interests are focused on desires of mortals -- possibly including themselves. This is seen in "it is impossible for one to `cross the line` into Christ without `crossing the line` into the church."†† Christ here is used as a tool of proselytizing to them. At this level of religious interest in themselves, interest in serving Jesus Christ according to His real ways might not exist.

Here we reach extremes: uncharitable and calloused attitudes against people. This is seen in "We desire to call all accountable men, women, boys, and girls back to this truth: THE BIBLE ONLY MAKES CHRISTIANS ONLY AND THE ONLY CHRISTIANS. To some people (unfortunately some even in the Lord's church today) this is `sectarian` or `patently impossible` or even `boring,` but WE BELIEVE AND WE KNOW - AND ARE EVEN EXCITED ABOUT IT - THAT SUCH THINKING IS WRONG - DEAD WRONG!"\*

These people are "excited about" belief that only those in their religious institution are Christians. If they are right, untold numbers of Christians go to Hell, but this does not seem to concern them enough to prevent being "excited about" this belief, or to prevent disappointment that some do not share this belief.

It gets worse. There is "hate wearing the livery of love" and "malignant spirit"‡; people get "vicious" and common courtesy that would be given to strangers is withheld from the disagreed-with.†† With uncharitable and malignant attitudes, and without genuine care for Jesus Christ's real ways, calling people `wrong` is far short of where they stop. **Free indulgence in factious lust can be corrosive -- let us all beware of that.**

\* In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page FORWARD.

\*\* In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page SOUND DOCTRINE.

^^ In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page 583.

^^ In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page 583.

† Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

† In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page "I AM A CHRISTIAN."

†† In Hightower, Denominationalism Versus the Bible, page 594.

‡ Ketcherside, In the Beginning, page 213.

†† Phillips, Don't Shoot: We May Both Be on the Same Side, page 119.

It can happen again. As of c. 2000, there is a trans-denominational push for unity – on Scripture’s terms. As these efforts bear fruit, let us remember this lesson of history,<sup>1n</sup> and be wary of urges from our carnal natures, lest we give up any progress we make.

From Some Early Restorers:

"We heartily unite with our Christian brethren of every name" – 1804.\*

It is most unfortunate that many later Restorers refused that sentiment.

\* Barton Stone and others, quoted by B. Stone in his autobiography in Thompson, *Voices from Cane Ridge*, page 85.

Topic #2 of 3: The Smaller Major Portion of the Restoration Movement

The other major part of the Restoration Movement was earlier than the larger Restoration body which led to the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches. It was identified by various names: the Christian Church, the Christian Connection, the Christian Connexion, and the General Convention of the Christian Church were among them.

It was a convergence of several groups that began in the late 1700’s and opening of the 1800’s. It was led by Elias Smith and James O’Kelley<sup>2</sup> and Abner Jones.<sup>3</sup> One of the groups that eventually converged was about half of Barton Stone’s group that did not merge with Alexander Campbell’s group<sup>4</sup> forming the larger Restoration body. The reasons for that arise from the differences between the larger Restoration body and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion.

One of the largest concerns was conceded to be valid by B. Stone: A. Campbell’s group had “an unwritten ‘theory of notions’” used “to measure the religion of others.”<sup>5</sup> In that culture “religion” would have been synonymous with Christian life. The Christian Connection, in contrast with A. Campbell’s group, had no “unwritten theory of notions” used to “measure” Christian quality.

The Christian Church sought to emulate the first century church.<sup>6</sup> They were resolutely biblical,<sup>7</sup> uncompromising in New Testament faith,<sup>8</sup> and insisted on cooperation among believers regardless of differences in thought.<sup>9</sup> They distrusted uniformity.<sup>10</sup> Uniformity of belief was not expected and not wanted.<sup>11</sup> One reason for this: “genuine religion can breath freely only in an atmosphere of freedom.”<sup>12</sup> Further, a consensus was that without any creed-like statement guiding Scripture inference, the Scriptures would be better understood and used more.<sup>13</sup>

Individual freedom in inference of Scripture was encouraged.<sup>14</sup> An 1850’s effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: “This,” as one held up a Bible, “is what we believe.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Factious Restorationists have been very militant with their factiousness. Example: in 1919 and the 1920’s, factious periodical *The Christian Standard* began publishing attacks on the United Christian Missionary Society because on the mission field, Chinese congregations were accepting Christians not properly baptized.\* These attacks and calls to others to oppose the UCMS escalated up to the 1940’s.\*

In Restoration polity, elders, not missionaries, oversee congregations. Had Independent Christian/Church of Christ insistence on ‘congregational autonomy’ been held to, they would have accepted these congregations’ right to set membership rules that do not divide against unbaptized Christians. Desires to 1) gratify factious lusts, and 2) ensure ‘proper respect’ to their cherished precepts on baptism, took precedence. Both of these remain common Restoration problems as of c. 2000.

\* Corey, *Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy*, pages 71-2, then 198-208.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, page 115.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, page 190.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, page 190.

<sup>5</sup> West, *Barton Warren Stone*, page 191.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 63.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 47.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 48.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 47.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 48.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 63.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, page 63.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, *The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine*, pages 46-7.

<sup>14</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, *Theology and Identity*, page 36.

<sup>15</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, *Theology and Identity*, page 34.

The Christian Church/Connexion devised this list of "Five Cardinal Principles" in 1866:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, our only Creed or Confession of Faith.
4. Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of fellowship and church-membership.
5. The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all."<sup>1</sup>

The Christian Church<sup>2n</sup> insisted on "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as quoted above and related to that, the necessity of toleration and cooperation among Christians who had differences in thought.<sup>3</sup> As stated before, an 1850's effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: "'This,'" as one held up a Bible, "'is what we believe'"<sup>4</sup> – a right sentiment to have.<sup>5n</sup>

The Christian Church accepted plurality of thought, but not plurality of lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> The Christian Connexion associated the word "Christian" with ethics rather than "doctrine," and had piety and morals as definers of the church.<sup>7</sup> An "obedient Christian" could not be made by assenting to a confession, creed, or similar statement if the person was not imitating Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> In this Restoration body, how the Christian lived was of primary importance.<sup>9n</sup>

A concern of the Christian Connection about the other Restoration body was conceded as valid by B. Stone: A. Campbell's group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."<sup>10</sup> The Christian Connection, unlike A. Campbell's group, had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality. They wanted to free common people from creeds<sup>11</sup> whether written or not. Elias Smith called for the liberty which the newly-born United States enjoyed politically to arise in the church religiously.<sup>12</sup> They believed the Bible, accepted difference in thought otherwise, and made Christian life primary in judging Christian quality.

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<sup>1</sup> W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

<sup>2</sup> The reader may notice similarities between the Christian Connection and what this study advocates. I came to these views before knowing of the Christian Connection.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

<sup>4</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 34.

<sup>5</sup> It would be great if all church people who insist on accepting differing thoughts within the church would staunchly insist that God's Book is to be believed.

A premise frequently asserted by detractors of God's Book is that believing the Bible prevents unity in the church. History shows this false.

Truth: believing God's Book and accepting differences in religious thought among Christians is very doable. As of c. 2000 there are Christians in the Disciples of Christ who do that, and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion did that.

The Lord's cause would be greatly benefited if church people who insist on acceptance of differing views on religious details among Christians would staunchly insist that the God's Book is to be believed in its every detail.

<sup>6</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 37.

<sup>7</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 35.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 64.

<sup>9</sup> That is a contrast with the factious Restoration groups even as of c. 2000. It is all too common for a person who routinely behaves in ways inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings to be well accepted because s/he promotes the group's precepts.

If a person brazenly behaves in ways that show no following of Jesus Christ, but aggressively promotes group precepts, the conduct is viewed as unproblematic because 'S/he promotes the truth.' S/he is viewed as 'faithful' because s/he promotes 'the truth.' If anyone mentions how the person's conduct was inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings, the reply is 'Well, s/he was speaking the truth.'

In such groups, a person is made 'faithful' by ascribing to a group of precepts even if s/he has no use for the ways of Jesus Christ. This is in stark contrast to the view in the Christian Church.

<sup>10</sup> West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 50.

<sup>12</sup> Elias Smith 1808 article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, pages 30-1.

It is evident that the Christian Connection could not safely merge into the larger Restoration body. The larger group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."<sup>1</sup> The Christian Connection had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality. Rather, it insisted upon "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as one of its Cardinal Principles.<sup>2</sup> The Restoration was a staunchly Bible-believing movement, but the approach to handling Scripture was different between these two groups.<sup>3</sup> As much of the larger Restoration body would insist on its "unwritten 'theory of notions'" being subscribed to in order to fully accept Christians in the Christian Connection, it was best the Christian Connexion not join it.

<sup>1</sup> West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

<sup>3</sup> An example of the differences is in how the two Restoration groups handled Christians misled about baptism. We will discuss Scripture's teachings about baptism, then discuss the larger Restoration body and the Christian Connexion.

At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge."\* Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

A common retort to justify improper modes of 'baptism' is along this line: "Do you think it makes any difference how much water is used? Why?"\*\* Answer: it does not matter what we think. The Greek used shows that we need to use enough water to do as Jesus Christ said. We are to do as Jesus Christ told us to do -- period.

However, not all Christians understand that correctly. One problem is that the English word used to translate the Greek has meanings incompatible with the Greek word. The two Restoration bodies handled unbaptized Christians differently.

An example of the larger Restoration body comes from 1957 in Australia. The Churches of Christ there differ some with U.S. Churches of Christ, but both come from the larger Restoration body. Closed membership limits church membership to those properly baptized. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?'" and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."\*\* Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ.

While recognizing sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."\*\*

A Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was beyond the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally they directed this attitude to acknowledged Christians: 'Christ might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as 'inadequate,' and brazen exclusivist factiousness.

In contrast, here is how the Christian Church in 1827 New England handled those not properly baptized: "'baptism is only one thing, viz., a burial in water; and that it is enjoined on believers only; that it is the duty of all believers to be baptized as soon as they are born again.'"^\* This accords with Scripture. The practice of "'the elders and brethren'": "'they do not think a believer ought to be driven to submit to that command before he sees the duty, and do not think a brother should be shut out until he is baptized; but they consider their duty to instruct such in the way of the Lord more perfectly.'"^† That is a good approach to the matter of unbaptized Christians; it promotes Bible truths, but avoids factiousness.

\* Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 391.

\*\* My Church: An Adventure in Christian Fellowship, page 89.

^\* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, page 81 then 155.

^† Quoted in Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 91.

Barton Stone was a leader in both groups. When about half of B. Stone's group did not merge with A. Campbell's group, it left about half that did. Shortly after that merge, adherents of A. Campbell's group began asserting their views on those who had merged with them.<sup>1</sup>

The partial merge was not wise for anyone wishing for Christian unity. Barton Stone found that out too late. Late in life, he sat in his own congregation weeping as exclusionist messages were preached from his former pulpit against Christians who had been sprinkled<sup>2</sup> rather than properly baptized. B. Stone saw too late that the merge made him seem to approve of a narrow factionism,<sup>3</sup> and he came to be portrayed as someone favorable to that cause.<sup>4</sup> The cause of real church unity suffered too. Factionists in A. Campbell's group got an opening to recruit protégés from a group that was unity-seeking.<sup>5n</sup> The Restoration body that became the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches grew hordes of factionists that were destructive to it and other church groups. Overrun by factionists led to fewer unity-seeking Christians than could have been.

Fortunately, the merge was only partial. From its beginnings, the Christian Connexion held all Christians to be one regardless of differences in religious thought.<sup>6</sup> It centered on advocating a broad fellowship of Christians.<sup>7</sup> An 1874 *Manifesto* held unity to be mainly a matter of Christian spirit and character, not of "doctrine" or polity which was held impossible, in contrast to the only unity that was held possible, which was unity from love and forbearance which Christians should have.<sup>8</sup> Unity with outside church groups had already been a basis for the Christian Church's venture.<sup>9</sup> Its "mission" included something worded as so: "give a true fraternity to all Christians of all denominations."<sup>10</sup>

The General Convention of the Christian Church no longer exists. It merged with Congregationalists to form the Congregational Christians in 1931.<sup>11</sup> Throughout its 130+ year life, it demonstrated that unity can exist without uniformity of thought.<sup>12n</sup> While the Disciples of Christ struggled with factiousness, the portion of the 1800's Christian Connection that merged with them did contribute their tolerance of differing thought and wide fellowship parameters.<sup>13</sup> The Disciples of Christ, as a body of congregations, did recover the original unity emphasis of the Restoration.

Topic #3 of 3: The Restoration and the Brethren Compared

Annotations in the prior topic referred to the Brethren. The Brethren exist in several denominations as of c. 2000, but the Brethren movement began in Europe in the early 1700's. They use similar terminology to many parts of the Restoration, and had parallels in their histories.

For instance, a former Brethren referred to a non-Brethren church as "denominational"<sup>14</sup> like is common in the Churches of Christ, redefining 'denomination' as 'group other than ours.' Likewise, Restoration groups commonly claim the likes of "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible"; among Brethren "No creed but the New Testament" has been a common sentiment.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morill, History of the Christian Denomination in America, pages 304-5.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 272.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 272.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 273.

<sup>5</sup> Merging groups is not necessarily a good idea. Organizational mergers are not necessary for biblical unity, and do not automatically facilitate it.

<sup>6</sup> Fagley, The Congregational Christian Churches Part 1, page 79.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, page 47.

<sup>8</sup> Gunneman, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ, page 165.

<sup>9</sup> Gunneman, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ, page 163.

<sup>10</sup> Dayton Christian Ministerial Association in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 29.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 190-1.

<sup>12</sup> Please see Part 6/A *Trio of Positive Examples from History* for more about them. In Canada, this legacy became part of the United Church of Canada.\*

\* Hunter, The Congregational Christian Churches Part 2, page 42.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, page 48.

<sup>14</sup> Cole, Roots, Renewal, and the Brethren, page 61.

<sup>15</sup> Bowman, Brethren Society, page 357.



Forerunners to the Brethren included the 1600's-1700's Collegiants. They were groups interested in independent study of Scripture, who believed in adult baptism by immersion, in freedom for anyone to speak, in mutual toleration, and who welcomed all Christians regardless of denomination.<sup>1</sup> They had members of Reformed congregations, Mennonite congregations, other formal congregations, or no formal congregation,<sup>2</sup> and helped other church groups.<sup>3</sup>

The Brethren movement, like the Restoration movement, was strongly unity-seeking. We can see these in the statements of early Brethren leader Anthony Norris Groves:

"The basis of our fellowship is LIFE in the Christ of Scripture rather than LIGHT on the teaching of the Scriptures. Those who have part with Christ have part with us. Because our communion is one of life and love more than one of doctrine and opinion, we seek to show that the oneness in the life of God through Jesus Christ is a stronger bond than that of being one of us — whether organizationally or denominationally"

"Because our fellowship is based on our common life in Christ, we do not reject anyone because of the organization or denomination with which they may be affiliated; nor would we hold them responsible for the conduct within that system, any more than we would a child for the conduct in the home of which they are merely a part."

"We do not feel it desirable to withdraw from fellowship with any Christians except at the point where they may require us to do what our consciences will not permit, or restrain us from doing what our consciences require. Even then, we maintain our fellowship with them in any matter where we are not called upon to so compromise."

"We do not consider an act of fellowship to be indicative of total agreement; indeed we sometimes find it a needed expression of love to submit to others in matters where we do not fully agree, rather than to prevent some greater good from being brought about. Our choice would be to bear with their wrong rather than separate ourselves from their good."

"We believe it more scriptural to reflect a heart of love, ready to find a covering for faults, than to constantly look for that with which we may disagree. We will then be known more by what we witness for than by what we witness against."<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, this did not last. In the 1850's there was a split over unmet demands like "No Sunday-schools," "mode of feetwashing" and "no musical instruments" among others.<sup>5</sup> Over such trivialities, some Brethren were not willing to stay in a fellowship even with other Brethren.

The Brethren in the United States in the 1800's were a victim of the way denominations normally operated back then: in exclusivist rivalry. When a large Brethren population crossed paths with the Restoration Movement, there was trouble. Alexander Campbell, a Restoration leader, had a different approach for unity than some earlier Restorers; he wanted to get all Christians united into one group, and Brethren leader Timothy Banger replied to such a contact "I do not see any reason why *we* should join *you*, that would not equally require *you* to join *us*!"<sup>6</sup>

There was other trouble. Brethren leaders Joseph Hostetler and Peter Hon led about 3000 Baptists, New Lights, Quakers, and Brethren to join in one group as the two leaders joined the Restoration movement.<sup>7</sup> A Restorer/Disciple celebrated that Peter Hon had "laid aside two of his immersions,"<sup>8</sup> leaving the Brethren practice of triple immersion. By 1826, Joseph Hostetler, Peter Hon, and their following were disfellowshipped by Brethren farther east.<sup>9</sup> Brethren leaders at the Annual Meetings by the 1830's ruled denomination-wide not to accept single immersion baptism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Willoughby, The Beliefs of Early Brethren, page 48.

<sup>2</sup> Stoffer, Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines, page 10.

<sup>3</sup> Willoughby, The Beliefs of Early Brethren, page 48.

<sup>4</sup> Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, pages 298-9.

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Cole, Roots, Renewal, and the Brethren, pages 61.

<sup>6</sup> Sappington, Brethren in the New Nation, page 120.

<sup>7</sup> Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 176.

<sup>8</sup> Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 175.

<sup>9</sup> Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 173.

<sup>10</sup> Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine, page 176.

Many frontier Brethren left the Brethren for the Restoration movement out of desire to cooperate with other Christians without interference from eastern Brethren.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, there were better relations than these problems. In 1851, a Disciples evangelist in western Pennsylvania reported Brethren giving him a busy itinerary from invitations coming from "all directions to preach for them."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, evidently he was a good guest at Brethren assemblies.

Still, the problems could have been avoided. There was no need for the Restorers to try to get Brethren congregations to join their church group and abandon Brethren precepts. There was no need for Brethren to divide against Brethren who joined the Restoration.

What the Restorers/Disciples should have done is continue to seek Christian unity without regard to church groups. Witnesses of *The Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery*, which included Barton Stone, wrote "We heartily unite with our Christian brethren of every name" in 1804.<sup>3</sup> The intent was to "unite with" Christians "of every name" rather than have Christians join them.

Likewise, Brethren should have continued their original track of accepting Christians regardless of disagreement or denominational affiliation, and trying to serve the Lord together as much as possible. The Brethren farther east should not have disfellowshipped Brethren who had joined the Restorationists. There is no general reason why congregations cannot have two affiliations.

Unlike most of the Restoration outside the Disciples of Christ, as of c. 2000 the Brethren have moved substantially from their factious past. The Brethren, even with a restoration-seeking nature overall, began cooperative efforts with other church groups in the 1900's.<sup>4</sup>

The Ecumenical Movement and other efforts for trans-denominational cooperation have produced many opportunities for trans-denominational cooperation, which the Churches of Christ and Independent Christian churches have tended to refrain from them.<sup>5</sup> These have even refused to join the conservative National Association of Evangelicals because it had "fundamentalistic characteristics"<sup>6n</sup> and was too accepting of continued existence of separate denominations.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, the Brethren have gone far away from their factious past. The Brethren have joined a cooperative organization called the National Council of Churches of Christ, which has most of the Eastern Orthodox denominations<sup>8</sup> and liberal-led denominations. The National Council of Churches of Christ focuses on interdenominational cooperation in a variety of areas including evangelism,<sup>9</sup> although some parts engage in inappropriate activity.<sup>10n</sup> The fact remains that Brethren participate in an interdenominational cooperative endeavor that involves meaningful action.

In 1948, the Church of the Brethren was a charter member of the World Council of Churches.<sup>11</sup> In the early years of the WCC, they were in association with the International Missionary Council.<sup>12</sup> The latter's activities centered on bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to areas with little to no

<sup>1</sup> Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, page 176.

<sup>2</sup> Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine*, page 176.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Barton Stone in his autobiography in Thompson, *Voices from Cane Ridge*, page 85.

<sup>4</sup> Bowman, *Brethren Society*, page 357.

<sup>5</sup> Callen, North, *Coming Together in Christ*, page 41.

<sup>6</sup> You read that right: these staunchly Bible-believing groups stayed off the National Evangelical Association for its "fundamentalistic" traits! As of c.2000, factious Restoration groups take any `reason' to avoid genuine participation in church unity.

`Dialogue' and other `talks' to resolve religious disagreements are neither meaningful action nor genuine participation in church unity.

<sup>7</sup> James, North, *Coming Together in Christ*, page 41.

<sup>8</sup> P. Williams, *America's Religions*, page 353.

<sup>9</sup> P. Williams, *America's Religions*, page 353.

<sup>10</sup> The NCC has unfortunately been dragged by bad leaders into controversial political causes and forms of liberalism. Due to this, it has faced attack by Christians within and outside of its member church groups, and made member church groups unhappy.\*

\* P. Williams, *America's Religions*, page 353.

<sup>11</sup> Bowman, *Brethren Society*, page 423.

<sup>12</sup> W. A. Visser 'T Hooft article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 2:1185.

Christian presence.<sup>1</sup> The WCC, in its early years, had an agency that enabled member church groups to share information regarding experience with evangelistic activities and new methods of evangelism.<sup>2</sup> The Church of the Brethren was a charter member of this cooperative scheme, even if it has not since gone well.<sup>3n</sup> The fact remains that the restorationist Brethren were among the first to participate in an interdenominational cooperative endeavor that involved meaningful action.

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχσοσταςια, and ends "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV|TNIV); διχσοσταςια means "standing apart."<sup>4</sup> Divisive tendencies are just like tendencies to those other much-disdained sins listed in the passage. May the whole church resist them as so.

*FACT: Church division's end during the whole week does not depend on us agreeing during weekends. Such division can fade out if we put our all-day everyday task for Christ first: let us agree to disagree on weekends as needed, and focus on our common task to do good for Jesus Christ all day, everyday, all week, every week.*

<sup>1</sup> Miner Searle Bates article in Loetscher, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ..., page 1:586.

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Visser 'T Hooft article in Loetscher, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ..., page 2:1185.

<sup>3</sup> The WCC has had leaders who have given support to unpopular political, economic, and justice causes.\* Such leaders have often engaged in political one-sidedness and even justified violent uprisings called for in some forms of liberation theology.\*\*

There are WCC leaders, NCC leaders, and denomination leaders who misuse their positions to push agendas largely unwanted in these groups. Matthew 20:25-6 says "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. |But it should not be that way among you.| Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant'" (NASB|ICB|TNIV).

May such leaders who would be good Christians heed this teaching of Christ.

These leaders should be aware that these church groups are parts of the **LORD's** church, and leaders should treat them so. These leaders should lead these parts of the Lord's church to do what He stated He wants His followers to do -- they should not set aside those priorities, and should not misappropriate these church groups' assets for personal agendas. There will come a time when these bad leaders can no longer spurn Bible-following and Bible-respecting servants of Jesus Christ. This will either happen in their lifetimes, or afterward. There are such leaders who merely 'esteem' Jesus, but are not believers on Him. If the unbelievers do not repent of hijacking these portions of the Lord's church for their own misuses as far-left socio-political groups, they will likely cower before an angry Lord Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, Christians should not allow such people to influence them into abandoning unity-oriented ventures, and also the church should learn from the past. Such persons pretend to believe things they do not in order to get control of church groups' resources,\*\* and exploit unity ventures. The goal is promoting via religious means agendas that are church-inappropriate, and do so using church resources. It is common for religious unbelievers to call for "academic freedom"^^ to express views hostile to Christian faith while in church-sponsored positions. Often, the "academic freedom" they call for is only for them and others like them. Many seminaries and originally-Christian colleges have been made into places where Bible-believing academicians are 'not qualified,' and Bible-believing students are disdained -- and too often disallowed privileges, graded and/or 'disciplined' accordingly. It happens too often that a religious society claiming to be a church congregation that is "open to all" browbeats "born-again'" and "any form of conservatism" and is "really" "open to all except conservatives.'"† These hijackings are complete.

The church should seek ways to better safeguard itself and block such people from positions of influence. Also, we should not let the irresponsibilities of these people influence us to avoid unity ventures.

\* David B. Eller's article in Durnbaugh, Meet the Brethren, page 85.

\*\* D. F. Wright article in Ferguson, et al, New Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, page 220.

^^ Machen, Christianity and Liberalism, page 165 and 167.

^† In Criswell, Believer's Study Bible, page 1778.

† From story in C. Berry, Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church, page 226.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

### Written and Unwritten Creeds, or Whatever Term – The Party Line

Many Christians have views they wish promoted in the church. They know that some people who do not share those views are Christians, but are unwilling to act meaningfully on this. In any congregation of Christ's church, whether someone is a follower of Jesus Christ should be preeminent.

At Matthew 16:18, Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). The process is shown at Acts 2:47, which reports that the Lord Himself was "adding to | them day by day" (NASB | ASV) each newly-saved convert. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> A Christian is 'one who follows Christ's teachings.' A Christian is someone who believes on Jesus Christ as to be a follower of His teachings in daily life. In Jesus Christ's church, any person who fits this criteria has been added by Him to His church.

In any congregation of Christ's church, the primary criteria of a person's standing ought to be whether someone is a Christian and added by the Lord Himself to His church. Sadly, often it is not. Rather, it is how well the person knows and stands for a collection of additional group precepts. Some of these collections are acknowledged creeds; some are called something else but are the same thing.<sup>3n</sup> The worst ones are unwritten and are not acknowledged to exist.

In many cases, the people treated most as being 'a part of the congregation' are those who best 'toe the party line' on denominational/'brotherhood'/'fellowship' distinctives regardless of how they follow Christ's teachings in overall life. The people put in places of responsibility are those who best 'toe the party line'<sup>4n</sup> regardless of how they follow Christ's teachings in overall life, or competency for the task. In politics, this is cronyism and it is illegal in some countries; on the basis of partisan loyalty, important state jobs are given to people far less-qualified for them. The exact same thing happens in the church: people very well-qualified for a task get passed over for people far less-qualified – for no other reason than who agrees 'faithfully' with the 'expected' group tenets.<sup>5n</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>3</sup> Some 'not-a-creeds' are lists of 'expected' 'inferences' of Scripture that 'clarify' what people 'should' 'infer' from Scripture to be 'sound Christians.' Each one is every bit as much an extra-biblical authority as any acknowledged creed.

<sup>4</sup> An example of a 'not-a-creed' creed was some rules in a Bible school's operations code. The items were "'not to be taken as a church creed or discipline'" but "'merely statements which disqualify men from places of authority in this institution" in the mid-1900's.\*

This list of rules had the precise and expressed intent of determining a person's place in this church institution. The goal was to limit anyone who disagreed with this 'not-a-creed' creed to lesser positions. There are many such 'not-a-creed' creeds that are just as exclusivistic or more exclusivistic.

\* DeGroot, New Possibilities for Disciples and Independents, page 65.

<sup>5</sup> I can give a specific example from 2006 in the United States. A trained, licensed, and experienced school teacher was blocked from a teaching role in a congregation while people were being recruited for teaching roles. While non-educators were supervising and teaching classes of children, the school teacher was relegated to 'assisting' the recreation leader with several adolescents -- doing next to nothing.

This was suspicious. The problem was only found out after the congregation's primary leader was sought out in private and asked; the primary leader did not like the person's views on security of the believer and on baptism's role in salvation. It did not matter that the professional teacher had been careful to keep quiet about these views: he subscribed to only most of the unwritten creed, and so was assigned to a waste of his time while he was passed over for less-qualified personnel.

Another ill of such things: needed tasks left undone despite availability of qualified people.<sup>1n</sup> In many groups, where a Christian 'stands' on their 1 Timothy 6:3-4/Titus 3:8-9 "unprofitable" (ASV) "disputes" (NKJV) and "strifes" (ASV) irrelevant to "a godly life" of "good deeds" (NLT 1996) is held most important - not the Christian's qualities as a follower of Christ Himself and qualifications for the task itself. This is wrong; the work of the Lord is too important for cronyism.

Unwritten creeds can cause Christians to be unexpectedly and/or secretly marginalized for views they did not know were 'unacceptable.'<sup>2n</sup> At Matthew 16:18 Jesus said "I will build My church" (NBV) - not 'our church.' We ought not act as if Christians are 'less Christian,' 'less faithful,' or 'less sound' based on creeds - whatever term is used.<sup>3n</sup> All Christians are in the Lord's church; it is no mortal's place to deny any Christian full standing in a congregation thereof based on such things.

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<sup>1</sup> I can give a specific example of this happening. In 2007 a newly-established church congregation had a school teacher approach the pulpit minister about starting a children's ministry. The pulpit minister convened a meeting of the congregation's men. The pulpit minister and other men showered the teacher with questions about his views on their favorite bickerings with outside church groups. There were no questions about his experiences working with children, his qualifications, or his Christian walk. These bickerings would not have any relevance to children, but the men were not satisfied. The congregation remained without a children's ministry.

<sup>2</sup> An example comes from the United Kingdom in 2009 among a group which denies being a denomination. They see themselves as the Lord's church, and outside Christians as attending "denominational" institutions instead of meeting with 'the Lord's church.'

A woman in this group had served at a children's camp for years. On a secular website, she called the group a denomination. The wrong person saw this and summoned her. She was surprised, but for her violation of the 'We are not to be thought of as a denomination' precept of the unwritten creed, her role in ministry was taken away.

For more examples, we saw in *Part 6/A Lesson from History* how the Restoration began in the U.S. calling for no creed beyond Scripture. Still, a woman can come to one of these groups new, mention belief in the Rapture, and her welcome is shortened.\* Someone might seek to connect to a congregation, mention belief to an elder that Christians stay saved, and get quickly ushered out the back door.\* Christians new to these groups are often unaware these widely-held beliefs are 'deeply unacceptable.'

\* Rick Grover article in G. Carson et al, One Church, page 53.

<sup>3</sup> An example is from 1957 in the Restoration group in Australia, the Churches of Christ, which differ some with U.S. Churches of Christ; the subject: closed membership, which limits church membership to those properly baptized. As we studied in *Part 6/A Lesson from History*, the Restoration began in the U.S., and it called for no creed beyond Scripture. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?'" and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship.\* Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ.

While recognising sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."\*

A Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was beyond the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally they directed this attitude to acknowledged Christians: 'The Lord might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as 'inadequate,' excluding members of His church from congregations thereof, and was brazen exclusivist factiousness.

\* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, pages 81, 155.

### Hebrews 12:1-2a: How the Christian Walks

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside [all that presseth downe], and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (ESV|BishB|ESV).

We are to "run" a "race" "set before us," "lay aside" any hindering weight, and be "looking to Jesus."

For an athlete in a footrace, other athletes do not mitigate the athlete's need to run; s/he must give an individual effort. Other athletes do not make the athlete inherently stronger; they might motivate the athlete to work harder, but they do not change the athlete's ability. Christian life is likened to a footrace here at Hebrews 12:1-2a; the Christian life hinges on individual, not group, effort.

In many church groups, people see the Christian walk as a group endeavor. They want to be in 'the right group,' choose 'the right group,' and show they did not 'err' in choosing 'the right group.' They then feel like a good Christians because they are in, are led by, and support 'the right group.'

*Some see the Christian walk as a group effort, and not as an individual following of Christ.*

A potential pitfall of group-focused Christianity is diverting attention from individual walk when not group-engaged. Bible study becomes little more than analysis of groups, and ultimately, into little more than 'hunt for ammunition' against outsiders<sup>1n</sup> and fodder for self-congratulation.<sup>2n</sup> 'Favorite verses' get chosen based on these. "Christian service" becomes about attending group functions and about competition with outside church groups. At this extreme, the Bible user pays less, little, or no attention to parts of Scripture about life away from religious group settings.<sup>3n</sup>

The New Testament is not a manual for group meetings.<sup>4n</sup> *It never was intended to be a 'church constitution,'* but a handbook of Christian living. The Scriptures are provided to teach the individual person how to serve God rightly in overall life. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."<sup>5</sup>

2 Timothy 3:16-7 does NOT say 'group that serves God' but individual "person who serves God."

<sup>1</sup> Of course, others being wrong on something does not make any group right on everything.

In factious rivalry, a common fallacy is to assume that if every targeted group can be shown wrong on something, it means that the attacking group is right on everything. The approach is 'That group are wrong on this, this other group is wrong on that, every other group is wrong on this/that/the other; therefore, our group is the one you ought to join.' In reality, other groups' rightly or wrongly-alleged errancy does not make any group inerrant.

<sup>2</sup> **If a person gets a thrill from 'We and not them' gloating, s/he should beware of a factiousness + pride pair.**

Often, people in church settings begin discussions about things about their church group that they think makes them better than other church groups. This is natural, as they chose their group for reasons. This is not always wrong.

However, there are times when this arises to celebrating that outside church groups do not have these things. The real or wrongly-alleged 'down sides' of outside church groups are celebrated. The people become happy that not only are they 'better' than everyone else, but 'everybody else does not have what we have.' This is a factiousness + pride pair.

<sup>3</sup> An illustration of just how much dispute-irrelevant portions of Scripture are undervalued: in one largely-factious church group, leaders have even forbade preaching Old Testament passages.\* The Old Testament is quoted and exposted much in the New Testament, but as it is pre-church, it does not touch on church issues. Hence, it is seen as not meriting being preached on.

\* Terry Briley's article in Baker, Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement Volume 2, page 265.

<sup>4</sup> That is why it takes gleaning to get hints on New Testament-era congregation meetings.

<sup>5</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

In 1981 James W. Fowler initiated a theory of progressions of religious faith among Christians in the western world. It has six "stages," and "stages" 2-5 have non-rare appearance among adults. "Stage" 2 is found mostly in children, though some adults adapt a form of it; here, matters of faith are strictly one-dimensional: there is only one meaning to any religious communication of word or deed, and events are cause-effect.<sup>1</sup> "Stage" 3 is group-centered; the person entrusts a group for guidance on what beliefs to have.<sup>2</sup> "Stages" 4-5 are more individualistic: "Stage" 4 people feel more responsibility for their convictions and are willing to reexamine their own faith assumptions,<sup>3</sup> and "Stage" 5 people are willing to look for and learn from what those in other groups can show them.<sup>4</sup> My summary of his "stages" is very simplistic for brevity. I think of these "stages" more as types of faith, as my observations suggest people can have aspects associated with "stages" that are not next to each other.

J. Fowler observed that most middle-class American churches operate toward a "Stage" 3 group-centered faith as of 1981.<sup>5</sup> In the decades surrounding 2000, my own experience among biblically conservative congregations and church-related groups is similar. 'Thinking for oneself' is encouraged so long as the group tenets are never doubted fully or more than briefly, and/or other groups are not shown 'too much' respect. Individual reflection of faith must be restricted within group norms among most such religious groups, or people get uncomfortable and reactionary.

Beyond the group-centered "Stage" 3 of faith, the believer is less extrinsically motivated to act on faith and more intrinsically motivated, and such believers are more likely to have a more committed faith.<sup>6</sup> A Hebrews 12:1-2a direction of faith matches this. Luke 7:9 records Jesus using a Gentile's "great faith" (ASV) as an example for Israel. Jesus Christ wants believers to have strong faith.

Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>7</sup> A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings. To be a Christian is to answer His call at John 21:22 "follow thou |Me" (ASV|NBV). It is an individual following.

When it comes to church congregations, Christians need to maintain a right focus for their Christian walks and faith. Hebrews 10:24-5 says

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [not giving up] our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (NASB|TNIV|NASB).

The purpose of church meetings is to encourage Christian walk. Hebrews 12:1-2a says

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside [all that presseth downe], and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (ESV|BishB|ESV).

Let us note some things here: a running race is not a group effort, and we are each to be "looking to Jesus" – not any group. Our group is mutual encouragement, but the race is for us to run as persons.

We are also to "lay aside" whatever "presseth downe" to hinder us, and "sin." Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality" (ESV), has διχοστασια, and ends "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."<sup>8</sup> Divisive group fixation is a potential hindrance to our walks as Christians --which per Hebrews 12:1-2a are our own individual races as followers of Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 149.

<sup>2</sup> Fowler, Stages of Faith, pages 172-3.

<sup>3</sup> Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 182.

<sup>4</sup> Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 198.

<sup>5</sup> Fowler, Stages of Faith, page 294.

<sup>6</sup> Fowler, Stages of Faith, pages 300-1.

<sup>7</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>8</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

### Attitude Problems and a Quartet of Biblically-Associated Sins

We now turn to certain contra-Scriptural attitudes that have appeared in the church and led to divisive conduct. We will answer them from the Scriptures.

#### Bad Attitude #1 of 2: 'Knowing' Too Much

Jesus at Mark 7:21-3 had a list of sins that begins "evil thoughts, sexual immorality," has "coveting," and ends "pride, foolishness" (ESV). Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "sexual immorality," has "idolatry" (ESV) and διχοστασια,<sup>1</sup> and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV); διχοστασια literally means "standing apart."<sup>2</sup> These two lists both have "sexual immorality" and describe the same level of carnality; unsurprisingly, "pride" and acts of division are transitively associated.

At Matthew 16:15-8, Jesus Christ was talking with His disciples, and we pick up:

"'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

It is commonly known that "Peter" is an Anglicized transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.<sup>3n</sup> "Peter" is Πητρος and "rock" is πετρα. Πητρος means "a small stone" and πετρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>4</sup> Jesus said that He would build "my church" upon the πετρα: "'You are the |Christ|, the Son of the living God.'" This is the one premise upon which Christ's one church is built: that truth that Jesus Christ is the Christ and the Son of the living God.<sup>5n</sup> The word "church" translates εκκλησια, used similarly in ancient Greek culture about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>6</sup> This parallels how Christians are followers of Jesus Christ; per Acts 11:26 "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and is plural for Greek meaning "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>7</sup> Hence, Jesus Christ said at Matthew 16:18 in essence 'I will build My community of people who follow My teachings.'

1 Timothy 1:5-6 has "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion" (NASB). In the same epistle, at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, we see this warning:

"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and |does not adhere to| sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to |a godly life|, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in |disputes" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Here at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, the Greek under "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."<sup>8</sup> 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."

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>7</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>8</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.



As we see from 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, people leaving 1 Timothy 1:5-6 "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" for "fruitless discussion" (NASB) were off-focus from "godly living" and from anything Jesus Christ said "words" about, and were focused on promoting their own thoughts in the Lord's church.<sup>1n</sup> That has been a problem since the New Testament-era.

Many people treat disagreement with them on what they think the Lord wants taught as disagreement with the Lord Himself. This is not right; Ecclesiastes 5:2 says "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth" (JPS 1917). None of us mortals is the Lord. Romans 11:33b-4a says "how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (ASV). **No mortals should dare presume that a disagreement with them over a disputed matter is a dispute directly against the Lord, because no mortal is the Lord. No mortals should dare presume that a 'failure' to agree with them is disobedience to the Lord, because no mortal is the Lord.**

A common idea is 'Given our position and experience, we are sure that the Lord wants this taught or done, and those who do not follow our teaching disobey the Lord.' A related common idea is 'From what we have inferred from Scripture, we are sure that the Lord wants this taught or done, and those who do not follow our teaching disobey the Lord.' In either case, or any case similar to them, the 'what the Lord wants taught or done' came from human surmising. Hence, any such case results in treating teachings of mortals as teachings of God. We should not do that.

A very famous character in Scripture placed himself equal to God. That character boasted at Isaiah 14:12-5 "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). That famous Bible character is Satan, who found himself ejected from Heaven and doomed eternally. Inasmuch as any people treat their teachings about 'what God wants' as teachings of God Himself, they do a low-key replica of Satan's sin. Mortals must make a distinction between their teachings and the Lord's teachings.

Jesus reproved religious leaders' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. The same has happened in the church. Some of this "tradition of men" in the church are the famous masses of religious precepts foreign to Scripture. Other "tradition of men" is 'expected inferences' on Scripture that are passed on, and which are passed on as 'indisputably true.' When group leaders press 'expected inferences' of Scripture, and refuse to accept the possibility of mistake by predecessors on these, they do what Jesus reproved. These views of mortal predecessors are taught as indisputable divine truths. Regardless of the groups' terminologies, this is exactly what Jesus reproved.<sup>2</sup>

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to "Give diligence" in order to be "handling aright the word of truth" (ASV). 2 Timothy 3:16a describes Scripture as so: "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (ESV). Because "Scripture is breathed out by God," God actively produced Scripture. Because Scripture was produced by God, it would therefore be "word of truth." Therefore, to handle Scripture rightly, it takes a hard effort. The written Word of God is inerrant, but words of mortals about it are not. Treating rejection of inferences of Scripture as rejection of Scripture itself is treating our inferences as Scripture; it has the same effect as adding those inferences into the text. Revelation 22:18 forbids us to "add unto" (ASV) Scripture. We cannot treat our inferences of Scripture as Scripture itself. Again, Scripture is God's written Word, and we are not God.

In the church, we must avoid prideful thinking<sup>3n</sup> that our ideas about 'how to please God' are divine truths. Rather, let us see God's thoughts to be God's thoughts, and our ideas not.

*Bad Attitude #2 of 2: Treating Goodness as Expendable*

Jesus reproved religious leaders' "tradition of men" (ASV) meaning "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9. The "tradition of men"

<sup>1</sup> In some cases, precepts become objects of religious servitude. Some groups have made promoting such precepts a core part of their mission. This approaches idolatry.

<sup>2</sup> Holloway, Foster, Renewing God's People, page 12.

<sup>3</sup> Also, if someone's favorite things about group meetings include self-congratulation over their 'rightness' and gloating of others' 'wrongness,' s/he should beware of pride.

referred to in Mark 7:8-9 and Matthew 15:6-9 was from the Pharisees, whose prominent work was a mass of guidelines for following the Law,<sup>1</sup> which was the first five books of Scripture. This gave the core of Judaism. The Law was already long and complex enough, but Jewish priests of Jesus' time had added masses of complex and elaborate interpretations of it, and all Jews were expected to be bound by those added masses of interpretations.

The command to rest from labor on the Sabbath is in Exodus 20. By Jesus' time, that command was interpreted to limit even recreational activity, brief household tasks, travel, and nearly any other expenditure of effort.

We now turn to the situation of Mark 3:1-6. Behold this story of Jesus Christ:

"And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there who had his hand withered. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man that had his hand withered, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and his hand was restored. And the Pharisees went out, and straightway with the Herodians took counsel against him, how they might destroy him" [ASV].

Here, the Pharisees were opposed to a healing on the Sabbath! To them, it was too much like work. They were so concerned about 'proper respect' for their interpretations of Scripture that they were angry a good deed was done. As far as they were concerned, good deeds were expendable compared to 'proper respect' for their inferences of Scripture.

Titus 3:8b instructs "that those who have |believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds"<sup>2</sup> - exactly of the type Jesus Christ preached. Good deeds are a high priority.

In the church, too many people have withheld expressions of goodwill from persons who disagree with them about 'how to please the Lord.' Similar to the Pharisees of Mark 3:1-6, they are more concerned about 'proper respect' for their ideas on 'how to please the Lord' than they are about treating people as they should. Such people are more concerned about being agreed-with on 'how to please the Lord' than they are about treating rightly even His followers.

It gets worse. Some people do bad deeds toward those who disagree with them about 'how to please the Lord.' They are so sure that their 'how to please the Lord' ideas are divine truths that they presume to seek out and 'punish' those who disagree. Rather than be Jesus Christ's servants, they promote themselves to 'Christ's little helper' to 'keep charge over His servants.' This is unauthorized.

At Matthew 23:8 Jesus Christ said "One is your Teacher,| and all ye are brethren" (NASB|ASV), and at Matthew 23:10 He said "Neither be ye called masters: for |you have only one Master, the Christ" (ASV|NCV) None of us is to be 'Christ's little helper' keeping charge above His servants. Matthew 24:48-51 in a parable that Jesus Christ spoke has this warning: "if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow-servants and eat and drink with the drunken" (ASV), then he would be punished. This "evil servant" during his master's physical absence presumed for himself a position to "beat" other servants, and forsook what he himself was supposed to be doing. Many people do similar among the church.

We should not value religious precepts so much that we withhold good deeds because of them. We should not feel ourselves in a position to maltreat people because of religious precepts.

*Putting These Together*

These attitudes have prompted church people to think they are so much 'better' than some Christians that there is good cause to divide. One rationale is 'being in a league above,' and another rationale is 'punishing the wayward by dissociation.' Regardless of rationale, these attitudes should not be causing divisions in the church, because their very existence should be opposed in the church.

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<sup>1</sup> NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

<sup>2</sup> ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952.

*An Unholy Quartet of Biblically-Associated Sins*

Let us discuss two characters in Scripture who had problems with pride, with lying, and with slander – and one of whom also had a problem with factiousness. There are lessons to be learned.

We start with Satan. Isaiah 14:12-15 reports that Satan boasted within himself "I will be like the Most High" (JPS 1917). Satan's pride got him ejected from Heaven and doomed to eternity in Hell. He had two other defining traits:

- Revelation 12:9-10 calls him "the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night" (ASV)
- Jesus said of him at John 8:44 "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (NASB).

These two additional traits are that he likes to make accusations, and he likes to lie.

We now turn to Diotrefes, a person who led even to a rebellion against one of Jesus Christ's Personally-commissioned apostles. John wrote at 3 John verse 9 "I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to |have the pre-eminence among them|, does not accept our authority" (TNIV|ABUV|NBV). 3 John verse 10 has "he refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church" (TNIV). Here we see a man who was operating by this rule: 'If you are not in the group that gives me preeminence, you are not welcome here, and if you are among my group but welcome other believers, you are not welcome here either.'

3 John verse 10 has some detail about Diotrefes's pride and factiousness: it went beyond this to "unjustly accusing us with wicked words" (NASB). Verse 11 urges Gaius "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (ASV). John called Diotrefes's pride, slander, lying and factiousness what it was: "evil."

Pride, lying, and slander were in two Bible characters infamous for rebellion against the Lord's authority. For the Bible character in flesh among the church, there was this fourth sin: factiousness.

In highly-factious church groups and church-related groups, it is common for group influencers to tell harmful lies to facilitate their agendas. It is common to hear/read accusations of 'wayward members' that are not true. It is common to hear/read accusations of other groups that are not true. This is not 'exposing their errors' and calling the other groups 'wrong.' What this is: claims that other groups have religious tenets and practices that they do not really have. Further, the perpetrators are entirely unconcerned about whether or not the accusations are false. If someone shows the allegations inaccurate, the perpetrators will more likely revile the informant<sup>1n</sup> than change.

Within these highly-factious groups, substantial portions of adherents either approve of these happenings or are unconcerned about them. Rather than be bothered that such wickedness is occurring in 'church business,' they often honor those who do this wickedness as 'taking a stand for the truth.'<sup>2n</sup> To honor such wickedness under any guise is a serious wrong.

Revelation 22:15 warns that "every one that loveth and maketh a lie" (ASV) will be excluded from Heaven. Scripture closely associates pride, factiousness, slander and lying. Church people should beware that indulging in the sin of factiousness invites its three toxic companion sins.

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<sup>1</sup> The most common bases upon which factious lying accusers revile those who 'dare' to correct their false accusations are that

- 1) the person simply opposes biblical truth,
- 2) the person is an 'undercover agent' of the slandered group.

Of course, a person who just does not like to see the wickedness of false accusation really has no such motives. However, factious lying accusers care little to nothing for what is right or wrong when it comes to their factious interests.

<sup>2</sup> The most common tactics to excuse willing false accusation seem to be:

- 1) 'I am simply preaching the truth from the Scriptures,'
- 2) 'S/he is just taking a forceful stand for the truth from the Scriptures.'

Both of these ways have been effective ways for liars and false accusers to avoid the issue of their sin. Of course, accurate statements about Scripture do not make false accusations of people true. Of course, being 'right' does not mean that we can do what Scripture teaches against. There is no 'rightness exemption' in Scripture.

### Problems with Understanding Scripture

#### Misunderstanding #1 of 7: 'Not Dividing Implies Approval'

Many church people view a refusal to divide against others as an indication of approval of others' precepts. Such a teaching is not taught in Scripture, and actually Scripture speaks against it. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians about their participation in idol temple meals, and were not rebuked for that issue in itself. We start at 1 Corinthians 8:1-6 with what the empirical truth is:

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know; but if any man loveth God, the same is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" [ASV|NASB].

Here, it is shown that empirically, no idol has reality. Eating food sacrificed to idols has no religious reality either. However, we now go to 1 Corinthians 8:7-11 about concern for other Christians:

"However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, when they eat it, they feel guilty. But food will not commend us to God: neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours cause those who are weak in faith to fall into sin. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food sacrificed to idols while thinking it is wrong to do so? And so by your knowledge this weak person is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. When you sin against your brothers and sisters in Christ like this and cause them to do what they feel is wrong, you are also sinning against Christ. So if the food I eat causes them to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again so that I will not cause any of them to sin" [ESV|NCV|ASV|NCV|NASB|ESV|NCV|ESV|NASB|NCV].

What we see is that Paul rebuked the Corinthians for being reckless with their liberty about eating food offered to idols at idol temples: their recklessness was causing "weak" Christians to do "what they feel is wrong." There is no rebuke of the activity in itself. We see no 'Do you not know that participation in idol temple meals shows an approval of idol worship?' No such text exists here or elsewhere in Scripture. Had presence at idol temple meals implied approval of idol worship, then we can be sure that Paul would have objected. He did not object, so presence at idol temple meals did not imply approval of idol worship

Gatherings of Christians are not idol temple meals. Even if they do not agree, fellow Christians share a common target of religious service: Jesus Christ. Fact: Scripture does not teach that presence universally means approval.

Any opinion that presence universally means approval is a non-biblical opinion. In contrast, that Christians are to refrain from acts of dividing is an explicit directive of Scripture. Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, contrary to what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart."<sup>1</sup> Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church. Non-biblical opinions do not provide a legitimate basis upon which to 'suspend' Scripture's commands against acts of dividing.

#### Misunderstanding #2 of 7: 'We Are Right, so It Is Okay'

Many church people have this mistaken belief that being 'right' makes a lot of things 'okay.' When it comes to dividing within the church and strife with other parts of the church, they assume that these acts too are 'okay' as long as the doers are 'right.' They assume that the Lord would be 'on their side.' The truth is that the Lord is never 'on our side' in the act of sinning.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

To illustrate the wrongness of many people's views on division and strife within the church, we will use a school playground analogy.

One school year at Fictitious Elementary School, the normal playground monitor was Ms. Monitor. On the first day of school, Ms. Monitor told the students her playground rules before allowing them on the playground. One of those rules was that there never be any violence.

One day, some children asked Ms. Monitor if she preferred that the children not play two-hand touch football. Because such games can devolve into rougher football, she did indicate that she did prefer that students play other games.

On a later day, a two-hand touch football game ensued. Those children who had asked Ms. Monitor about her feelings regarding two-hand touch football told the players that they were disobeying Ms. Monitor by playing two-hand touch football. When the players replied that they were not disobeying Ms. Monitor by playing the game, the response was to try to interfere with the game. Ultimately, the interfering students resorted to hitting players.

Ms. Monitor put the students who had interfered with the game in a playground detention area for a week, while the two-hand touch football players continued to play. When the punished students objected that she told them she preferred everyone play a different game than two-hand touch football, she told them that they were right on that. She also told them that she did not make a rule against two-hand touch football, but she did have a rule that there not be any violence. She said they broke that rule, and their punishment was deserved.

As we can all see from this allegory, the offending students were absolutely right that Ms. Monitor preferred that students not play two-hand touch football. That did not mean that they could do anything they wanted when the subject became a reality.

Many people in the church behave similarly to the offenders of this allegory. If a matter of dispute comes up, they try to figure out what the Lord would prefer taught or done. Thus far there is no problem. However, once they think they have figured it out, they seek to get everyone else to see things their way, and act as if those not convinced are in sin against the Lord. They do this even if the Bible gives no indication that unconvinced people sin by being unconvinced.

Romans 16:17 condemns *διχοστασια* translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); *διχοστασια* is literally "standing apart"<sup>1</sup> and refers to dissociation. Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church even before that letter was written. To engage in acts of division in the church is sin.

In church division and strife over religious disagreement, those who are guilty assume that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'on their side' because they are 'right.' They assume that if they show themselves 'right,' then they show that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'on their side' in their actions. They are not correct. 'Rightness/wrongness' does not turn sins into non-sins. People being 'right' would not mean they can respond to 'wrongness' in ways the written Word of God prohibits.

The reality is that when church people seek to enact division in the church, showing themselves 'right' would not mean that their action is not sin. Their action would remain sin. Further, there is no way that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'on their side' as they do the sin.

*Misunderstanding #3 of 7: Thinking Inference 'Trumps' Statement*

Many church people have this mistaken belief that they can do different from what the Bible says based upon things that the Bible does not say. Now, there are many cases where a Scripture passage is most reasonably understood to be teaching something it does not explicitly say - but the passage still does not explicitly state it. There are many times that a Scripture passage is rightly understood to be teaching something - but the passage still does not explicitly state it. Scripture can teach something but still not explicitly state it. Even so, we not right to act contrary to what Scripture explicitly says for things which Scripture does not explicitly say.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

There are times where someone initiates or proliferates division or factiousness in the church based upon inferences of Scripture. This is not to be done.

The following illustration will demonstrate the point to be made. While teaching, imagine that a mathematics instructor says "There are three apples and four bananas." A student tells a classmate "The teacher said that there are seven pieces of fruit." Now, the teacher's statement can reasonably be understood as saying that. Loosely speaking, s/he did say that. Strictly speaking, s/he did not. The teacher said the words that s/he said. If the disparity matters, the teacher can say "I did not say that; I said" and repeat the words s/he actually spoke, and be in the right.

Here is another illustration. Imagine that this same mathematics instructor says "Hay dos hombres y tres mujeres." A student tells a classmate "The teacher said 'There are two men and three women.'" The translation is entirely accurate. Loosely speaking, the teacher did say that. Strictly speaking, s/he did not. The teacher said the words that s/he said. If the teacher says "I did not say that; I said" and provides the words s/he actually spoke, s/he is in the right.

There are times when Scripture explicitly says something. There are times when what Scripture says can be rightly inferred as teaching something it does not explicitly say. Any such inferences cannot be given the same weight as explicit statements of Scripture - let alone greater weight. What Scripture explicitly says should not be 'trumped' by any inferences of Scripture.

John 17:20-1a "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Jesus Christ wants His followers united as "one" in serving Him.

Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" was NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,<sup>1</sup> which have been found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. This epistle was originally a circular epistle intended for all Christians, and would have covered all church congregations of Christians for immediate audience. Ephesians 4:2-3 says "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love |; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996|ASV).

Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"<sup>2</sup> and refers to dissociation. Christians had been taught to refrain from acts of dividing within the church even before that letter was written. To engage in acts of division in the church is sin.

These are things Scripture explicitly says. Regardless of any inferences of Scripture, what Scripture explicitly tells us to do or not do must be preeminent. Regardless of any inferences of Scripture, explicit statements of Scripture against factiousness and to seek unity are to be followed.

*Misunderstanding #4 of 7: 'It Is Not That Simple'*

There are two passages that should be taken at face value, but which often are not:

1 Timothy 6:3-4a "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and | does not adhere to| sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to | a godly life|, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in |disputes"  
(NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Titus 3:8b-11 "I want you to insist on these things, so that they who have |believed God| may be careful to devote themselves to good |deeds|. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned"<sup>3n</sup>  
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

<sup>1</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> "Law" is the first five books of Scripture. Regarding "factious man" (ASV), the KJV has "heretick" here. The Greek word has no reference to religious error and means "party" in a factional sense -- A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

Greek translated "does not adhere to" at 1 Timothy 6:3-4 is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."<sup>1</sup> The problem with the disapproved teaching is merely that it is "different" from teaching about "godly life" and "words" of "our Lord Jesus Christ." Accuracy is irrelevant; if the teaching was off-topic from those subjects, it was disapproved-of. Titus 3:8-11 warns of "factious" people with "a morbid interest in disputes." The "law" = first five books of Scripture, and the "foolish questionings" were over Scripture and would have involved a lot of Scripture-backed statements. Still, the "foolish questionings" and "disputes" are "unprofitable" because they are irrelevant to

- 1) anything "our Lord Jesus Christ" spoke "words" about, which were mainly about:
  - a) how we should live our overall lives, and
  - b) His work and importance for our salvation,
- 2) "good deeds" and "godly life."

Factions have a tendency to press the views they are rallied around. Paul indicated that factions were not to form from differences in thought about 'peripheral' matters unrelated to those two subjects.

1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11 mean what they say. In the church, we often do not realize this.<sup>2n</sup> Many in the church focus on disputes over subjects irrelevant to

- 1) anything "our Lord Jesus Christ" is recorded speaking "words" about, which were mainly about:
  - a) how we should live our overall lives, and
  - b) His work and importance for our salvation,
- 2) "good deeds" and "godly life."

Per 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11, we should not be doing these things. It really is that simple.

In the church, people often think that the Scriptures here are 'not that simple,' or 'not that cut and dried.' 2 Timothy 3:16-7 describes Scripture as so:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the person who serves God may be complete, entirely instructed for all good work."<sup>3</sup>

God gave Scripture so that His servants can know everything we need to know to do to please Him. Of all things Scripture addresses, it will be most thorough and clear about what we need to DO.

Therefore, when 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11 warn us not to fixate on nor factionalize over disputes which are irrelevant to

- 1) anything "our Lord Jesus Christ" is recorded speaking "words" about, which were mainly about:
  - a) how we should live our overall lives, and
  - b) His work and importance for our salvation,
- 2) "good deeds" and "godly life,"

they **mean simply and exactly what they say**. Let us act accordingly.

*Misunderstanding #5 of 7: Not Distinguishing Christians from Otherwise*

Many church people do not fully distinguish between Christians and non-Christians as they should. Jesus Christ said at Luke 12:51 "Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (ASV). Greek translated "division" here is διαμερισμος.<sup>4</sup> It appears only at Luke 12:51 and the sense there is "strife"<sup>5</sup> contrasted to "peace"<sup>6</sup> referring to hostility against Christians by the world. There is division between the church and the world.

The church and the world are separate entities. A lot of church people do not recognize that, and treat servants of Jesus Christ as if they are of the world. We will examine this statement by a unity-oriented writer of the Disciples of Christ and a response by a factious writer of the same fellowship from before the 1968 split:

<sup>1</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

<sup>2</sup> This included me at one time.

<sup>3</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>5</sup> in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

"It should be a matter of just pride that our missionaries have been leaders in cooperative work with other church bodies. These consecrated workers have felt that since God was evidently cooperating with Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, they, too, should do so"<sup>1</sup>

which the factious writer quoted and then responded

"We do not know on what ground the assumption of God's cooperation with the various denominations is made, but it is highly probable that the same evidences could be given to support the idea that God is cooperating with the Roman Catholics, the Mohammendans, and the Hindus."<sup>2</sup>

In passing, we note that the factious writer passed a pejorative judgment on something he admitted a lack of knowledge about. More importantly, we note that he did not make a distinction between "Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists" versus "Mohammendans and Hindus."<sup>3n</sup>

Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44<sup>4</sup> and "believers" (NASB) in such places as at Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe the people in the church. Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. "Christians" = "disciples" in "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB) per Acts 11:26; Greek μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>5</sup> A Christian is 'one who follows Christ's teachings.' A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings.<sup>6n</sup>

The world is an unholy thing. 1 John 2:16 has "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (ASV). James 1:27 says "Pure religion and undefiled |in the sight of| our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (ASV|NBV|ASV); Greek translated "religion" literally is "religious service,"<sup>7</sup> so "pure religious service" involves to "keep oneself unspotted from the world." The world is an unholy thing.

Colossians 3:12 speaks to Christians "as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved" (NASB) – notice that "holy" is included. 1 Corinthians 3:17 has "the temple of God is holy, and such are ye" (ASV); the people of the church are "holy."

1 Corinthians 6:11 says to Christians "you were washed, you were | made holy" (ESV|NCV), and Acts 10:15 says "What God hath cleansed, |you must not consider |unholy" (ASV|NASB|NBV). To consider Christians to be the same as the unholy unbelieving world is to do just such a thing.

A distinction must be made between any Christians and the unbelieving world. Christians are not to have the division among themselves that they have with the unbelieving world.

*Misunderstanding #6 of 7: Non-Christian Hunts*

Jesus Christ was preaching a sermon about regular life, and toward the end He went from talking about false prophets to talking about people in general, and says at Matthew 7:20-3

"Similarly, you will know people by the deeds they do. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. For many will say to me on that Day, 'Lord, Lord, |we spoke for you. And through you we forced out demons and did many miracles.' Then I will say to them clearly 'Get away from me, you who do evil. I never knew you'" (NBV|ICB).

This has gotten misunderstood to mean that we are to hunt for non-Christians in the church.

This passage tells us that we would know that non-Christians were such by the deeds they do in regular life. It does not tell us to do an inquiry if we do not know.

<sup>1</sup> Corey, Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy, page 165.

<sup>2</sup> Hayden, Fifty Years of Digression and Disturbance, page Twenty-one.

<sup>3</sup> The misspelling is original to the printed document. Mohammedans are Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>6</sup> We have no authority to call 'non-Christian' any person who fits the Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian." The Bible meaning of that term is to be accepted.

<sup>7</sup> In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.



Jesus Christ taught and explained the Parable of the Tares. It explains how trying to pull the unbelievers from the world could cause harm to believers. We head to Matthew 13:

Matthew 13:24b-30:

"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he saith, Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them" (ASV).

Matthew 13:37b-42:

"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil" (ASV).

The parable is about the world and believers, but the principle applies to other areas. Uprooting things implies forcible activity. Forceful activity to remove unbelievers from among believers can damage the latter too.

Such efforts happen. People presume for themselves the status of `watchdogs` and make it their task to look for and identify `non-Christians` in the church. These hunts are an unfortunate result of thinking Christians are defective because of opinions on distinctly-religious details and/or what happens during assembly – it can arise to deciding Christians are `non-Christians` based on these things. We know this because it has happened.

Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) at Acts 2:44<sup>1</sup> and "believers" (NASB) in such places as at Acts 5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2 to describe the people in the church. "Christians" = "disciples" in "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB) per Acts 11:26; μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB) and plural for "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>2</sup> A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings.<sup>3n</sup>

We are not told to go hunting out non-Christians in the church. From the principle of the Parable of the Tares, we can see that such endeavors can inflict collateral damage on the church. We should not do such things. We also should not do what leads to it: attempts to judge quality of Christians in areas that Scripture does not appoint to us.

*Misunderstanding #7 of 7: Failure to See Certain Sin as What It Is*

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that begins "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, (ESV), has διχοστασια<sup>4</sup> "standing apart"<sup>5</sup> and ends "drunkenness, | orgies, and the like" (NASB|TNIV). This is a list of very carnal vices.

The church understands there is no way to treat "sexual immorality" or "impurity" or "idolatry" or "drunkenness" or "orgies" as `okay.`<sup>6n</sup> As of c. 2000, there are church congregations and church-related groups who stand against "sexual immorality" and "drunkenness," and rightly so – and from the same pulpits proudly say they `will not fellowship with` groups that will not come to agree with them on favorite group religious precepts. They are against those other sins, as they ought to be – but as for another sin of the same class, they heartily endorse it!

The fact is that διχοστασια "standing apart" is classed with those other sins. Many in the church need to treat διχοστασια "standing apart" in the same ways as those other sins.

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>3</sup> We have no authority to call `non-Christian` any person who fits the Bible meaning of the Bible term "Christian." The Bible meaning of that term is to be accepted.

<sup>4</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>6</sup> The church would devolve into moral debauchery if these sins were treated the same as many treat factiousness. `What they are doing is causing a temptation to me` would be considered an acceptable reason to indulge -- with disastrous results.

### An Example of Factiousness Made to Look Good

Topic #1 of 2: The Example

Many church people engage in factiousness while portraying it as a good thing. We consider one widespread example here: closed membership. Closed membership prohibits full status in a congregation to Christians not rightly baptized.<sup>1n</sup> It ranges from trivial withholding of privileges to automatic refusal to acknowledge Christian status at all. Regardless of reason, closed membership is refusal to fully accept unbaptized Christians, and thereby creation of an exclusivist faction.<sup>2n</sup>

To be sure, it is important that Christians be baptized. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NASB|NCV). First, Christ told us to baptize "disciples." Second, Jesus Christ expects His followers to be baptized in His Name just as He expects them to obey Him. If a person knows rightly about water baptism, yet has a resistant attitude toward water baptism itself,<sup>3n</sup> then s/he has the same attitude toward obeying Jesus Christ. It would not be fitting to 'baptize' such persons, as they are not Christians.

As true as this is, it is equally true that not all unbaptized Christians are non-Christians. Not all unbaptized Christians are resistant against baptism; some are hindered from baptism by such things as ignorance, mistake, or circumstances. We must handle this reality biblically.

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<sup>1</sup> James O'Kelley/O'Kelly, a Restoration leader, referred to closed membership as so: "the door to that Church is water"\* -- a true observation. Acts 2:47 examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved" (ASV|NASB). The Lord is Door and Doorman to the church. Biblically, we come to water after coming to Him.

\*James O'Kelley "Plan of Christian Union" quoted in its entirety:  
MacClenny, The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly, page 248.

<sup>2</sup> A clear illustration of this is from 1957 in the Restoration group in Australia, the Churches of Christ. Differences exist with their U.S. counterparts; one of these is that even 50 years later U.S. Churches of Christ did not normally acknowledge unbaptized Christians and often discouraged adherents from doing so. As we discussed in *Part 6/A Lesson from History*, the Restoration began in the U.S., and it called for no creed beyond Scripture. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?' and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."\* Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ. While recognising sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."\*

Clearly, a Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was more than the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally there were acknowledged Christians who, while accepted by Jesus Christ into His church, were rejected by mortals from membership in congregations thereof for not adopting favored group precepts. The attitude is 'The Lord might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as 'inadequate,' and was brazen exclusivist factiousness.

\* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, pages 81, 155.

<sup>3</sup> Care should be taken before someone who resists being baptized is assumed resistant to baptism itself. Personal experience recalls someone who was not baptized for eight years only because the congregation required public baptism and s/he was shy. Others have resisted baptism fearing potential negative consequences. This is not to say that such reasons are okay, but to point out that not everyone who resists being baptized is resistant against baptism itself.

Scripture explains proper baptism. 1 Peter 3:20-1 refers to "water"<sup>1</sup> and relates baptism to it as "figure | doth now save you, even baptism, | not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a | clear conscience" (BishB|ASV|NASB|RSV 1952); baptism represents "an appeal to God for a clear conscience," which is the repentance within conversion. Greek transliterated "baptize/baptism" means "dip,"<sup>2</sup> "make overwhelmed,"<sup>3</sup> "immerse,"<sup>4</sup> "completely submerge."<sup>5</sup> This is assumed common to Christians at Romans 6:2-11 where we are pictured buried as dead and resurrected up as we are baptized in water and raised. Christian baptism extended the conversion baptisms of ancient Judaism, where converts immersed themselves.<sup>6</sup> In Scripture, "baptize" requires immersion of a convert. Any water procedure not applied to a convert and not involving immersion is not baptism.

Not all Christians know this fully. Many Christians hold baptism very highly, and yet are not baptized. Many think a water ceremony they had before conversion, or a pouring or sprinkling ceremony they had, was baptism - or at least enough of a baptism that they would sin via `rebaptism.'<sup>7n</sup> It is wrong, but it is a reality; that reality must be dealt with biblically.

We have to recall who a Christian is. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) to describe the church at Acts 2:44.<sup>8</sup> Scripture uses "believers" (NASB) for servants of Christ in such places as Acts 2:47+5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2; Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) the same way in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>9</sup> A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings; if a person meets the Bible meaning of "Christian," s/he is a Christian.<sup>10n</sup>

In Matthew 28:19-20a Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NASB|NCV). We are to "make disciples" and "Baptize them," meaning we are to "baptize" "disciples." Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB). If we are to follow this directive rightly, we must acknowledge that converts we baptize are already Christians.

Some people do not fully accept the implications of this<sup>11n</sup> or accept this at all. One person claimed wrongly of the Restoration movement "it has sought to inclose within the fellowship those who desired to be united with Christ in terms of His will, and at this point, Christian immersion enters the picture."<sup>12</sup> The earliest congregations of the Restoration movement did open membership<sup>13</sup> and many congregations refused to change from this.<sup>14</sup> Still, after enough congregations adopted the change from open membership, closed membership became perceived as the norm - as the quoted author shows. Then, faithfulness to Jesus Christ came to be judged by baptism. For instance:

<sup>1</sup> Noticed from "Baptism, which is symbolized by that water" (ISV).

<sup>2</sup> Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 50 NT.

<sup>3</sup> Strong, Exhaustive Concordance, page *Greek Lexicon* 16.

<sup>4</sup> New Baptist Church Manual, page 36; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1214 in Catechism of the Catholic Church, page 312. Note: Many Baptists use none of the `Baptist Church Manuals.'

<sup>5</sup> Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 191.

<sup>6</sup> Chronological Study Bible, page 1099.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 14:23 has "Anything that is done without believing it is right is a sin" (NCV). Pushing baptism on people who think their baptisms would be sin pushes them to sin.

<sup>8</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>9</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>10</sup> Scripture gives no permission to call `unbeliever' or `non-Christian' any person who fits the Bible meaning of "Christian."

<sup>11</sup> The Book of Acts meticulously records Christian baptism, and none for Apollos. The example of Apollos at Acts 18:24-8 shows that Christian baptism was not a must-have for acceptance by the church. This does not negate a Christian's duty to be baptized, but biblically, baptism as a Christian is not a must-have for acceptance by the church.

<sup>12</sup> Ford, A History of the Restoration Plea, page 170. The oddly-spelled word is original to the text.

<sup>13</sup> DeGroot, New Possibilities for Disciples and Independents, pages 34-5.

<sup>14</sup> Murch, Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement, pages 119 and 120.

"Again, Mr. Corey presents open membership in the most favorable terms imaginable. Why should he still deny his own approval of it, except that such approval is still in disfavor in the majority of churches? How, moreover, is one to `recognize' a Christian except by his obedience to Christ's command? If personal devotion and moral character are to be the only tests, then the church must accept a terrible responsibility for judging of personal matters."

No mistake: the primary criteria for whether or not to recognize Christians is not their service to Jesus Christ, but the immersion criteria "his obedience to Christ's command" – as if Christ really had only one.<sup>1n</sup> The author of that text shows not the slightest concern that many unbaptized Christians think they are baptized, and think they have followed that one of Christ's directives. The proposed excuse for making this one criteria preeminent is unbiblical: a congregation need not do any "judging" when a Christian moves from congregation to congregation in the Lord's church. Doing any "judging" of a Christian on the basis of one deed is far more risky than doing so on the many facets of overall life – assuming that a congregation's leadership insists on doing such presumptuous and unauthorized judging when a Christian moves from congregation to congregation in the Lord's church.

This brings us to a very important thing to be aware of: the church is the Lord's church. It is not `our church.' At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV). The word translated "church" in the New Testament is εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>2</sup> 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"<sup>3</sup> and is translated "followers" in the ICB. Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers. At Matthew 16:18 Jesus Christ said "I will build My church" (NBV) – that is "My church" meaning first-Person singular possessive: it is His church.

Scripture is clear as to Who the Ultimate Authority is over Jesus Christ's church. At Matthew 23:8 Jesus Christ said "One is your Teacher, | and all ye are brethren" (NASB|ASV). At Matthew 23:10 He said "Neither be ye called masters: for | you have only one Master, the Christ" (ASV|NCV). Per Jesus Christ, HE is the Person Who is the Ultimate Boss of His church. Not even His apostles could claim an authority equal to Him or even above other apostles.

The implications are strong. If a congregation is a congregation of the Lord's church, then it is in His church and falls under His jurisdiction. Scripture uses "believers" (NASB) for servants of Christ in such places as Acts 2:47+5:14, Acts 10:45, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, and 1 Timothy 6:2; likewise, Scripture uses "disciples" (ESV) for servants of Christ in such places as Galatians 1:13+Acts 9:1, Acts 14:20-2, and Acts 11:26. Acts 11:26 has "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); Greek μαθητας translated "disciples" is plural for "one who follows one's teachings."<sup>4</sup> A Christian is simply someone who believes on Jesus Christ so as to be a follower of His teachings. Scripture uses "all that believed" (ASV) to describe who composes His church at Acts 2:44.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, there is no record of Jesus Christ speaking any command to be baptized; He commanded us to baptize. Converts have a duty to be on the receiving end in that.

Nonetheless, a Christian who fails to be properly baptized has not disobeyed a recorded command of Jesus Christ; in many cases, s/he is a victim of someone disobeying the command of Jesus Christ. In such cases, s/he should not be treated as a guilty party.

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>5</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

Once Jesus Christ admits a believer to His church, that Christian is in His church. Congregations of the Lord's church are in His church. If a person has fulfilled the condition set by Jesus Christ to be admitted into His church, then s/he has met the condition set by Jesus Christ for admission into any congregation of His church. Any congregation leadership should not presume to refuse acceptance of any person whom Jesus Christ has admitted to His church. Whether on the basis of proper baptism *or on any other criteria*, no matter how biblically-based, this is not to be done.<sup>1n</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Having shown that baptism status of Christians is not an acceptable reason to divide in the church, I will show Bible facts about baptism and two sides of what should be done. At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge."\*\* Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

A common retort to justify improper modes of 'baptism' is along this line: "Do you think it makes any difference how much water is used? Why?"\*\* Answer: it does not matter what we think. The Greek used shows that we need to use enough water to do as Jesus Christ said. We are to do as Jesus Christ told us to do -- period.

However, not all Christians understand that correctly. One problem is that the English word used to translate the Greek has meanings incompatible with the Greek word. Even though "baptize" and "baptism" in English allow meanings outside what the Greek word means, the divine text used to express Jesus Christ's command is not in English, but in Greek: what the Greek means is what Jesus Christ commanded. Jesus Christ told us at Matthew 28:19 "completely submerge" "disciples" of Him.

Here is how the Christian Connexion in 1827 New England handled those not baptized: "`baptism is only one thing, viz., a burial in water; and that it is enjoined on believers only; that it is the duty of all believers to be baptized as soon as they are born again.'"^\* This accords with Scripture. The practice of "`the elders and brethren'" :

"`they do not think a believer ought to be driven to submit to that command before he sees the duty, and do not think a brother should be shut out until he is baptized; but they consider their duty to instruct such in the way of the Lord more perfectly.'"^†

This acknowledges that there is only one way to baptize: "burial in water" and those who have not had this are unbaptized. They are taught the truth about baptism, but not divided against if they fail to see their mistake. That is a good approach to the matter of unbaptized Christians; it promotes Bible truths but avoids factiousness.

On the other hand, here are some true statements expressed by a member of the Disciples of Christ, describing his group at that time:

"As to the form of baptism, the hold, in common with all other Christian bodies, that immersion is baptism. It is true that many others hold that sprinkling and pouring will do, but none dispute immersion. It passes for baptism among all denominations, so that in this they stand upon common and undisputed ground." †

This raises an important point: immersion is undisputed as valid baptism within the church, and to expand on that, immersion is the sole 'mode of baptism' that fits the Bible meaning of baptism. What is not baptism is disputed in the church, but what is valid baptism is stated in Scripture and undisputed within the church.

Many church groups that practice non-immersion water ceremonies call for church unity -- in the area of baptism, they need to do their part. *They* are using 'modes of baptism' that are out of harmony with Jesus Christ's directive and unacceptable to large portions of the church; rather than urge the larger church to accept 'modes of baptism' out of harmony with Jesus Christ's directive, *they* should amend their practice. If they want sprinkling or pouring involved in baptism, these activities can accompany proper baptism ceremonies; if they wish to have a sprinkling/pouring ritual for infants, do so, but after they become converts, baptize them. Eliminating baptism substitutes which discord with Jesus Christ's directive and which cause unbaptized Christians to stay unbaptized can greatly mitigate church division.

\* Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 391.

\*\* My Church: An Adventure in Christian Fellowship, page 89.

^\* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, page 81 then 155.

^† Quoted in Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 91.

† H. T. Morrison article in Sweeney, New Testament Christianity, pages 2:187-8.

*Topic #2 of 2: The Lesson of the Example*

As we just studied, there are people who make baptism in water a pretense upon which to divide within the church. We will study in Scripture where baptism should motivate unity.

Ephesians 1:1 KJV "at Ephesus" is NOT in surviving Greek manuscripts from pre-399 C.E.,<sup>1</sup> found on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The letter was initially a general letter to "the saints" in all church congregations. "Ephesians" 3:21-4:6 says:

"to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever, Amen. So I exhort you, prisoner as I am in the Lord, to conduct yourselves worthy of the calling you have received. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism. one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (NBV|NLT 1996|ASV).

In ancient times, baptism was considered an initiation rite that identified already-done conversion<sup>2n</sup>; in Christianity, unlike among other ancient religions, all Christians had/have only one prescribed initiation rite,<sup>3n</sup> which is baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. This passage "Ephesians" 3:21-4:6 shows we are to glorify Christ by "making allowances for each other's" real or alleged "faults" because we are all "one body" who ultimately identify of "one faith" to serve "one Lord" Jesus Christ.

As we can see from this passage of Scripture, the common "one baptism" appointed to all Christians was used to point Christians to be "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (ASV). Church people have insisted that Christians should divide on the basis of baptism in water; such persons misuse baptism in ways totally contrary to how the Lord intended it.

The excuse gets made 'If those other people would just get baptized rightly, then the cause for division would not exist.' The real cause for the division is the people who initiate the act of dividing.

This passage has a list of things that should remind Christians to be "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (ASV). The list includes three things church people have misused as 'good reasons' to initiate division in the church: the Lord, the Holy Spirit,<sup>4n</sup> and baptism in water. Things which Scripture says should unite the church are not valid bases to divide it.

Romans 16:17 condemns διχοστασια translated "divisions" in "keep an eye on those who cause divisions and temptations, | contrary to | what you have been taught, and to keep away from them" (NBV|ESV|NBV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"<sup>5</sup> and refers to dissociation. Christians had been taught against such conduct even before this epistle was written.

Ephesians 4:2-3 says "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NLT 1996|ASV). Many times in history, people have proposed 'good' reasons to divide within the church - even up to things Scripture expressly says should unite us. Any time we suspect we have a 'good' basis to divide the church, we should learn from this, and reject the notion.

<sup>1</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this, please see:

Part 4/The Nature of the New Covenant

Part 4/New Testament Example of Faith -- Baptism in Water.

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 3:3-9 refers to "mystery" (ASV) in Christianity. Mystery religions were about an entity who had overcome death,\* as Christ did. The competing ancient popular mystery religion Mithraism had multiple levels of initiation.\*\* All involved water and each represented rank.^\* It is evident that in Ephesians, Christianity was being compared favorably against Mithraism and similar rival religions.

\* Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, page 142.

\*\* Sarah Iles Johnston in Johnston, Religions of the Ancient World, page 104.

^\* E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, pages 276-7.

<sup>4</sup> In Scripture, tongues are a gift of the Holy Spirit. As of c. 2000, some Pentecostals do not acknowledge Christians who not practice modern speaking in tongues.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

### The Effects of Factionalism

After Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He said at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations | . Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). The "everything I have taught you" shows that He was instructing His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*.

Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' | doctrine | and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (ESV| KJV, NKJV| ESV). We can be sure that "the apostles' doctrine" was exactly what Jesus Christ called for at Matthew 28:19-20 "teach them to obey everything I have taught you" (NCV). Paul was an apostle, and he wrote at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a

"If anyone advocates a **different doctrine** and **does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life**, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in **disputes**" [NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV].

From these two passages, we see that the New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." We can find the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the four gospels and Acts 20:35.

Luke 11:23b is the end of a discourse about Jesus Christ regarding casting out demons after He had cast one out. At Luke 11:17-23 we read:

"But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and | he who does not gather with Me scatters" [ASV|NBV].

We note that this passage is primarily about Jesus' reply to an accusation that He cast out demons in service of Satan – but there are interesting things regarding His choice of words. One interesting thing to notice is how He starts this reply by discussing "a house divided" (ASV) and ends "he who does not gather with Me scatters" (NBV).

Within this discourse, Jesus Christ had something to say about division and people serving Him. This applies to His church: if we are not most interested in gathering people to Him, we will instead be scattering.

History is replete with groups that found one or more valid truths of Scripture, and went on crusades for them, and got stunted growth.<sup>1</sup> A case in point is the Restoration Movement in Canada. As we studied to start *Part 6*, the Restoration Movement led to the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches. In Canada, the Restoration Movement was at one time growing as fast as the Restoration Movement in the United States,<sup>2</sup> but was joined by many Scotch Baptists, who were very agreement-centered<sup>3</sup>; as of the late 1900's, Restoration groups in Canada had dwindled down to about 110 congregations due in part to internal fighting.<sup>4</sup>

A similar state of affairs happened in the United States among the Churches of Christ. In the mid-1900's, this argument-racked group was paying more attention to details of religious

<sup>1</sup> DeGroot, The Restoration Principle, page 7.

<sup>2</sup> Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 293.

<sup>3</sup> Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 293.

<sup>4</sup> Garrett, The Stone-Campbell Movement, page 296.

precepts than to concerns of morals and ethics, and so many young people left the group that a whole generation was nearly missing from the group.<sup>1</sup> This is a second case where interest in arguments over religious precepts stunted church growth. These two cases are just within the Restoration Movement. We can be sure that the entirety of the church can provide more examples of where fighting for religious precepts within the church resulted in a group's growth stagnating.

We have been warned against this. Jesus Christ said at Luke 11:23b "he who does not gather with Me scatters" (NBV). Paul was an apostle, and he wrote at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a

"If anyone advocates a **different doctrine** and **does not adhere to** sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the **doctrine conforming to** a godly life, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in disputes" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

The New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." We can find the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the four gospels and Acts 20:35. We are not to advocate "a different doctrine" that is irrelevant to the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life" - we are to "adhere to" these latter two things.

However, what we are not to do has happened, and it explains a lot of what has happened in the church. When church people decide that they are

- 1) more interested in getting people to adopt religious precepts unrelated to "sound words" "of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life,"
- 2) less interested in the "sound words" of "Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life,"

they are not primarily interested in gathering people to Jesus Christ. They are more interested in seeing people gathered to their religious precepts unrelated to 1 Timothy 6:3-4a "sound words" "of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Their priorities for gathering differ from those of Jesus Christ, Who is more interested in seeing people gathered to Himself. Therefore, they are not gathering with Him. The result: they scatter.

The nature of the church as of c. 2000 shows the legacy of this. There are church groups whose leaders and main influencers lead the church groups to stay antagonistic toward other church groups. There are church groups that formed because they needed to escape interference from leaders of an older church group. Some church groups have leaders and main influencers who may not engage in open hostility to outside groups, but certainly lead the church groups to stay aloof from other church groups. We have other church groups who have no desire to stay aloof from other church groups, but nonetheless their members have far more to do with each other than to members of other church groups. The c. 2000 church has sinful divisions and it also has separations.

It is a legacy of people whose gathering priorities were gathering people to religious precepts unrelated to 1 Timothy 6:3-4a "sound words" "of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "doctrine conforming to a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Jesus Christ said at Luke 11:23b "he who does not gather with Me scatters" (NBV).

### Major Misplaced Priority that Has Led to Factiousness

What Christians disagree over is mostly things that affect only a handful of hours on the weekends when church groups assemble themselves together. As far as how to

- 1) value Jesus Christ and
- 2) conduct ourselves throughout the week,

Christians are in overwhelming unanimity of thought. Unbelievers who do not study the church generally cannot distinguish among Christians.

What makes Christians different from other Christians is overwhelmingly within the handful of hours per week that we assemble with our church groups. Unfortunately, those differences have often been made a basis for acts of division within the church.

<sup>1</sup> Hughes, Roberts, The Churches of Christ, page 145.



After Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He said at Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). The "everything I have taught you" shows that He was instructing His followers to perpetuate what He had taught up to that time. Paul was an apostle, and he wrote at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a

"If anyone advocates a **different doctrine** and **does not adhere to** sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the **doctrine conforming to** |a godly life|, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in |disputes" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

From these two passages, we see that the New Testament-era church was expected to "adhere to" the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to "doctrine conforming to a godly life" of "good deeds." We can find the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" in the four gospels and Acts 20:35. Some of those "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" can be found at John 17:20-1a "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Jesus Christ wants His followers united as "one" in serving Him.

At 1 Timothy 6:3-4a Paul spoke sharply about anyone who "does not adhere to | sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to |a godly life" (NBV|NASB|NLT 1996). Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."<sup>1</sup> Those who were being castigated were not staying near to the approved subjects.

Matters that are relevant only to church assembly do not fit the 1 Timothy 6:3-4a "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NASB) or "the doctrine conforming to |a godly life" (NASB|NLT 1996). Jesus Christ had very little to say about activity at church meetings, and a handful of hours per week is not remotely all the time that we are alive. Even at 10 hours per week of assembly, this is still less than 6% of the 168 hours in a calendar week.

Scripture is God's written Word. It is also capable of telling us everything that we need to know in order to please God. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 describes Scripture as so:

"**All Scripture is breathed out by God** and profitable for |doctrine|, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness: so that the **person who serves God** | may be complete, | **entirely instructed for all good work.**"<sup>2</sup>

Let us be clear: Scripture was written by God Himself, and He wrote it so that His servants can know everything they need to know to do to please Him. There is no true flaw or shortcoming in it.

Scripture has little to say about the events of church meetings. This means that God in His written Word had little to say about the events of church meetings. Fact: there is not enough information in Scripture to reconstruct, without any human conjecture and/or 'fill in the gap,' even one congregation meeting in its entirety from start to finish.

If any person was to try to take just one congregation, and select one single meeting thereof, and try to reconstruct it in its entirety from start to finish without using any imagination, conjecture, or surmising, s/he would fail. The Scriptures do not provide even remotely that much information about any single meeting at any single congregation. The events of church meetings were given scant attention by God in His written Word.

It follows that matters relevant only at congregation meetings do not rise to the importance of a legitimate basis upon which to divide the Lord's church. A dying prayer does take a high priority: Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). That is of higher importance than the affairs of congregation meetings.

<sup>1</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

<sup>2</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

### A Trio of Positive Examples from History and Their Lessons

#### Positive Example #1: The Christian Connexion

The Restoration Movement's larger body led to the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches. There was a smaller body which was older, and identified by various names: the Christian Church, the Christian Connection, the Christian Connexion, and the General Convention of the Christian Church were among them.

It was a convergence of several groups that began in the late 1700's and opening of the 1800's. It was led by Elias Smith and James O'Kelley<sup>1</sup> and Abner Jones.<sup>2</sup> One of the groups that eventually converged was about half of Barton Stone's group that did not merge with Alexander Campbell's group<sup>3</sup> forming the larger Restoration body. The reasons for that arise from the differences between the larger Restoration body and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion.

One of the largest concerns for the non-merging portion of B. Stone's group was conceded to be valid by B. Stone: A. Campbell's group had "an unwritten 'theory of notions'" used "to measure the religion of others."<sup>4</sup> In that culture "religion" would have been synonymous with Christian life. The Christian Connection, in contrast with A. Campbell's group,<sup>5n</sup> had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality.

The Christian Church sought to emulate the first century church.<sup>6</sup> They were resolutely biblical,<sup>7</sup> uncompromising in New Testament faith,<sup>8</sup> and insisted on cooperation among believers regardless of differences in thought.<sup>9</sup> They distrusted uniformity.<sup>10</sup> Uniformity of belief was not expected and not wanted.<sup>11</sup> One reason for this: "genuine religion can breath freely only in an atmosphere of freedom."<sup>12</sup> They wanted to free common people from creeds<sup>13</sup> whether written or not. Elias Smith called for the liberty which the newly-born United States enjoyed politically to arise in the church religiously.<sup>14</sup> Further, a consensus was that without any creed-like statement guiding Scripture inference, the Scriptures would be better understood and used more.<sup>15</sup>

Individual freedom in inference of Scripture was encouraged.<sup>16</sup> An 1850's effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: "This," as one held up a Bible, "is what we believe."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hughes, Reviving the Ancient Faith, page 115.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, page 190.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, page 190.

<sup>4</sup> West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Campbell did not share the factiousness common in the group he led. People in his group took his ideas, and made them a basis for being factious. His life was complicated by altercations with people who went farther than he approved.

Bible-based unity-seeking survives in the Restoration as of c.2000 in the congregations of the Disciples of Christ. Many of the organizational agencies outside the congregations abandoned focusing on Jesus Christ's priorities for His church in the mid-1900's, preferring left-wing political radicalism, but many congregations remain focused on being church congregations.

Many Christians in the Disciples of Christ continue to believe the Bible. Accordingly, they believe in seeking non-factious cooperation with church congregations regardless of differences in religious details. There are congregations and individual Christians who have been doing this for decades.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 63.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 48.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 48.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 63.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 63.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 50.

<sup>14</sup> Elias Smith 1808 article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, pages 30-1.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, pages 46-7.

<sup>16</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 36.

<sup>17</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 34.

The Christian Church/Connexion devised this list of "Five Cardinal Principles" in 1866:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, our only Creed or Confession of Faith.
4. Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of fellowship and church-membership.
5. The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all."<sup>1</sup>

The Christian Church<sup>2n</sup> insisted on "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as quoted above and related to that, the necessity of toleration and cooperation among Christians who had differences in thought.<sup>3</sup> As stated before, an 1850's effort to draw up a list of definitive beliefs had this result: "This," as one held up a Bible, "is what we believe"<sup>4</sup> – a right sentiment to have.<sup>5n</sup>

The Christian Connexion accepted plurality of thought, but not plurality of lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> The Christian Connexion associated the word "Christian" with ethics rather than "doctrine," and had piety and morals as definers of the church.<sup>7</sup> An "obedient Christian" could not be made by assenting to a confession, creed, or similar statement if the person was not imitating Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> In this Restoration body, how the Christian lived was of primary importance.<sup>9n</sup>

It is evident that the Christian Connection could not safely merge into the larger Restoration body. The larger group had "an unwritten theory of notions" used "to measure the religion of others."<sup>10</sup> The Christian Connection had no "unwritten theory of notions" used to "measure" Christian quality. Rather, it insisted upon "right of private judgment and liberty of conscience" as one of its Cardinal Principles.<sup>11</sup> The Restoration was a staunchly Bible-believing movement, but the

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<sup>1</sup> W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

<sup>2</sup> The reader may notice similarities between the Christian Connection and what this study advocates. I came to these views before knowing of the Christian Connection.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 47.

<sup>4</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 34.

<sup>5</sup> It would be great if all church people who insist on accepting differing thoughts within the church would staunchly insist that God's Book is to be believed.

A premise frequently asserted by detractors of God's Book is that believing the Bible prevents unity in the church. History shows this false.

Truth: believing God's Book and accepting differences in religious thought among Christians is very doable. As of c. 2000 there are Christians in the Disciples of Christ who do that, and the Christian Church/Christian Connexion did that.

The Lord's cause would be greatly benefited if church people who insist on acceptance of differing views on religious details among Christians would staunchly insist that the God's Book is to be believed in its every detail.

<sup>6</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 37.

<sup>7</sup> Richard H. Taylor article in Johnson, Hambrick-Stowe, Theology and Identity, page 35.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth C. Nordbeck article in Brown, Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, page 64.

<sup>9</sup> That is a contrast with the factious Restoration groups even as of c. 2000. It is all too common for a person who routinely behaves in ways inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings to be well accepted because s/he promotes the group's precepts.

If a person brazenly behaves in ways that show no following of Jesus Christ, but aggressively promotes group precepts, the conduct is viewed as unproblematic because 'S/he promotes the truth.' S/he is viewed as 'faithful' because s/he promotes 'the truth.' If anyone mentions how the person's conduct was inconsistent with Jesus Christ's teachings, the reply is 'Well, s/he was speaking the truth.'

In such groups, a person is made 'faithful' by ascribing to a group of precepts even if s/he has no use for the ways of Jesus Christ. This is in stark contrast to the view in the Christian Church. In the Christian Church, a person would have been faithful only if s/he was living according to Jesus Christ's teachings, regardless of what thoughts s/he had.

<sup>10</sup> West, Barton Warren Stone, page 191.

<sup>11</sup> W. W. Staley article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 599.

approach to handling Scripture was different between these two groups.<sup>1n</sup> As large portions of the larger Restoration body would insist on its "unwritten `theory of notions'" being subscribed to in order to fully accept the Christians in the Christian Connection, it was best that the Christian Connection not join it, as being unity-oriented does not mean entering unwise mergers. The Christian Connexion believed the Bible, accepted difference in thought otherwise, and made Christian life primary in judging Christian quality.

<sup>1</sup> An example of the differences is in how the two Restoration groups handled Christians misled about baptism. We will discuss Scripture's teachings about baptism, then discuss the larger Restoration body and the Christian Connexion.

At Matthew 28:19 Jesus said "make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them" (NASB|NCV). Greek transliterated "baptize" means "completely submerge."\*\* Matthew 28:19 tells us to "completely submerge" "disciples" of Jesus Christ.

A common retort to justify improper modes of `baptism' is along this line: "Do you think it makes any difference how much water is used? Why?"\*\* Answer: it does not matter what we think. The Greek used shows that we need to use enough water to do as Jesus Christ said. We are to do as Jesus Christ told us to do -- period.

However, not all Christians understand that correctly. One problem is that the English word used to translate the Greek has meanings incompatible with the Greek word. The two Restoration bodies handled unbaptized Christians differently.

Many in the larger Restoration body have refused to acknowledge unbaptized Christians as Christians at all, but a more reasonable example of the larger Restoration body comes from 1957 in Australia. The Churches of Christ there differ some with U.S. Churches of Christ, but both come from the larger Restoration body. Closed membership limits church membership to those properly baptized. Here are words from a leader in the 1957 Churches of Christ in Australia: "We simply ask the question `Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?` and we accept that confession as the only faith essential to fellowship."\*\* Not so as we see from this criticism of open membership:

"This does not commend itself to the majority of members of Churches of Christ. While recognising sincere followers of Christ in other communions of different practices as Christians, it appears that consistency of witness can be maintained only by insisting on obedience in truth as understood within the movement"

and

"Though one may be accepted as a member of the Church universal, he may not be received into membership of a movement making a specific witness, without contributing to all those matters which are regarded as principles of the witness."\*\*

A Christian had to believe the right things about baptism to be fully accepted, which was beyond the so-called "only faith essential to fellowship." While externally ecumenical, internally they directed this attitude to acknowledged Christians: `Christ might admit them, but we will not unless they adopt our group's favorite precepts.' This was knowingly adding to the Lord's criteria for membership in His church, rejecting His criteria as `inadequate,' and brazen exclusivist factiousness.

In contrast, here is how the Christian Church in 1827 New England handled those not properly baptized: "`baptism is only one thing, viz., a burial in water; and that it is enjoined on believers only; that it is the duty of all believers to be baptized as soon as they are born again.'"\*\* This accords with Scripture. The practice of "`the elders and brethren'"": "`they do not think a believer ought to be driven to submit to that command before he sees the duty, and do not think a brother should be shut out until he is baptized; but they consider their duty to instruct such in the way of the Lord more perfectly.'"^† This acknowledges that there is only one way to baptize: "burial in water" so those who have not received this are not baptized. They are taught the truth regarding baptism, but are not divided against if they continue in their mistake. That is a good approach to the matter of unbaptized Christians; it promotes Bible truths, but avoids factiousness.

\* Stamatis, Catechetical Handbook of the Eastern Orthodox Church, page 391.

\*\* My Church: An Adventure in Christian Fellowship, page 89.

\*\* E. Williams, A Biblical Approach to Unity, page 81 then 155.

^† Quoted in Garrison, DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, page 91.

Barton Stone was a leader in both groups. When about half of B. Stone's group did not merge with A. Campbell's group, it left about half that did. Shortly after that merge, adherents of A. Campbell's group began asserting their views on those who had merged with them.<sup>1</sup>

The merge was not wise for anyone wishing for Christian unity. Barton Stone found that out too late. Late in life, Barton Stone sat in his own congregation weeping as exclusionist messages were preached from his former pulpit against Christians who had been sprinkled<sup>2</sup> rather than properly baptized. B. Stone saw too late that the merge made him seem to approve of a narrow factionism,<sup>3</sup> and he came to be portrayed as someone favorable to that cause.<sup>4</sup> The cause of real church unity suffered too. Factionists in A. Campbell's group got an opening to recruit protégés from a group that was unity-seeking.<sup>5n</sup> The Restoration body that became the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, and Independent Christian churches grew hordes of factionists that were destructive to it and other church groups. Overrun by factionists led to fewer unity-seeking Christians than could have been.

Still, the overruns by factionists did not overtake the whole larger Restoration body. There remained portions of the larger Restoration body that were not pervaded by factiousness. As of c. 2000, that describes many Christians and congregations within the Disciples of Christ. Despite mischaracterizations by many Disciples affiliates,<sup>6n</sup> there are many Christians in the Disciples of Christ who continue to believe the Bible in most details or in all details. They seek harmonious cooperation with Christians of any church group even if they do not agree on religious precepts. This state of affairs was threatened in Restoration history, but it persisted and is in lasting shape.

The Christian Connexion remained unfettered by factiousness. From its beginnings, the Christian Connexion held all Christians to be one regardless of differences in religious thought.<sup>7</sup> The movement centered on advocating a broad fellowship of Christians.<sup>8</sup> An 1874 *Manifesto* held unity to be mainly a matter of Christian spirit and character, not of "doctrine" or polity which was held impossible, in contrast to the only unity that was held possible, which was unity from love and forbearance which Christians should have.<sup>9</sup> Unity with outside church groups had already been a basis for the Christian Church's venture.<sup>10</sup> It included in its "mission" something worded as so: "to give a true fraternity to all Christians of all denominations."<sup>11</sup>

The General Convention of the Christian Church no longer exists. It merged with Congregationalists to form the Congregational Christians in 1931.<sup>12</sup> Throughout its 130+ year life, it demonstrated that unity can exist without uniformity of thought.<sup>13n</sup> While the Disciples of Christ struggled with factiousness, the portion of the 1800's Christian Connection that merged with them did contribute their tolerance of differing thought and wide fellowship parameters.<sup>14</sup> The Disciples of Christ, as a body of congregations, did recover the original unity emphasis of the Restoration.

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<sup>1</sup> Morill, History of the Christian Denomination in America, pages 304-5.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 272.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 272.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Summerbell article in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 273.

<sup>5</sup> Merging groups is not necessarily a good idea. Organizational mergers are not necessary for biblical unity, and do not automatically facilitate it.

<sup>6</sup> People in agencies that exist outside of congregational authority often make claims about 'the position of the Disciples of Christ' which typically are not remotely so.

<sup>7</sup> Fagley, The Congregational Christian Churches Part 1, page 79.

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, page 47.

<sup>9</sup> Gunneman, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ, page 165.

<sup>10</sup> Gunneman, The Shaping of the United Church of Christ, page 163.

<sup>11</sup> Dayton Christian Ministerial Association in Barrett, The Centennial of Religious Journalism, page 29.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht article in Foster, et al, Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, pages 190-1.

<sup>13</sup> In Canada, this legacy became part of the United Church of Canada.\*

\* Hunter, The Congregational Christian Churches Part 2, page 42.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, The Christian Denomination and Christian Doctrine, page 48.

*Positive Examples #2 and 3: Two Denominations*

We will study two denominations that no longer exist as of c. 2000.<sup>1n</sup> They are the

- 1) Congregational Christians, a merge of the
  - a) Congregational Churches of the United States, and
  - b) General Convention of the Christian Church,<sup>2</sup> also called the Christian Connexion,
- 2) Evangelical and Reformed Church, a merge of the
  - a) Evangelical Synod of North America, and
  - b) Reformed Church of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

These two denominations were formed from two effective mergers which can be closely replicated by the whole church. What these mergers involved: uniting without entanglement.

In the case of the Congregational Christians, the merging denominations' affiliated societies maintained their corporate identities.<sup>4</sup> The congregations were organized into voluntary fellowships with neighboring congregations, and a General Council coordinated voluntary national efforts.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, they adopted in 1932 a Plan of Union involving 12 articles of how the newly-merged denomination would operate.<sup>6</sup> In 1940 they adopted a constitution, but even before then they had an effective merger, as each denomination's congregations and agencies continued under their original constitutions and bylaws, and also the Plan of Union.<sup>7</sup>

As far as conformity of religious agreement, the Evangelical and Reformed Church was stricter. The standards for ministers, members, and congregations were the Heidelberg Catechism, Luther's Catechism, and the Augsburg Catechism, and where these differed, the person was free to choose the view expressed in one of these, with the final norm being Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Naturally, this approach would yield disagreements, and this was to happen. The Evangelical and Reformed Church's relationship to other church groups was to be unity-seeking and peaceful.<sup>9</sup> In the Congregational Christians, there was no creedal statement, and most congregations had considerable differences in religious thought within them, and even greater from congregation to congregation.<sup>10</sup>

There is some good lessons to be learned from this. Both denominations, when they merged older denominations, simply had their agencies continue to exist. In their merger, they operated according to a common standard, but still had their agencies continue to exist as before. In their mergers, they did not haggle over getting these agencies reorganized before enacting their union.

The church would do well to learn from this. Many plans for unity are plans for union, and involve much wasteful haggling that is not necessary. What happens all too often in efforts for union is entanglement. We need to accept that unity is not synonymous with union.

Our denominations can continue to exist separately. However, as a replacement for a Plan of Union, we can let the Scriptures take that role. Where we disagree over its teachings, we can adopt the approach of allowing each other to disagree but still serve the Lord together.

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<sup>1</sup> These two denominations merged in 1957 into the ill-fated United Church of Christ. From the mergers to the 1950's both church groups increased in members,\* but this has not happened in the UCC. UCC congregations are autonomous, but Bible-skepticism and other forms of liberalism have infested the denomination's structures of leadership. From 1990-2005 UCC attendance dropped from 667,809 to 495,284\*\* -- a drop of over 25%.

\* Articles in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of...*, pages 288-9, 402-3.

\*\* D. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, page 54.

<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:288.

<sup>3</sup> Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:288.

<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:288.

<sup>6</sup> Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

<sup>7</sup> Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

<sup>8</sup> Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, page 1:402.

<sup>9</sup> Carl E. Schneider article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ...*, page 1:402.

<sup>10</sup> Richard D. Pierce article in Loetscher, *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious ...*, page 1:288.

### Lessons of the Church Acting in Unity

#### Lesson #1 of 2: The Canadian and American Frontiers

To lay the background, we review two passages we will be alluding to. Hebrews 10:24-5 says "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [not giving up] our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (NASB|TN|NASB).

The purpose of church congregations is "to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" and to be "encouraging one another" in these. As long as a Christians meet for that purpose, they do as Hebrews 10:24-5 says. Jesus Christ said at Matthew 28:19-20a "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations|. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" (NASB|NCV). We are to go out and teach people to follow Jesus Christ and His teachings.

In the early 1900's, western Canada was sparsely populated. Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists were often unable to maintain distinct congregations, and therefore did Union congregations; this eventually led to the United Church of Canada.<sup>1</sup> Merging denominations is in itself indifferent to biblical unity, so here is the point: Christians are commanded to assemble per Hebrews 10:24-5, and by doing Union congregations, those Christians were able to assemble.

Frontier needs prompted efforts fitting biblical unity in the 1800's United States. Like in Canada during the early 1900's, throughout the 1800's the west in the United States was also sparsely populated by Christians. Christians are commanded to assemble per Hebrews 10:24-5, and at times on the United States frontier, even Protestants and Catholics were cooperating in ministrations.<sup>2</sup> Without these cooperative efforts, many Christians on the American frontier would not have been able to follow Hebrews 10:24-5 and assemble together to serve the Lord.

Before there was a western American frontier, there was an eastern American frontier. At Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, there was a camp meeting where Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists got together and preached.<sup>3</sup> Military personnel estimated 20,000-30,000 attendees at the event.<sup>4</sup> As many as five preachers preached simultaneously in various sites on the meeting grounds, and this meeting and others like it were reported to have changed the moral character of Kentucky and Tennessee.<sup>5</sup> This and similar revivals in the pre-1861 United States prompted a spirit of unity.<sup>6</sup> When Christian groups work together to urge people to live godly lives for Christ, as He ordained at Matthew 28:19-20,<sup>7n</sup> it unites those church groups because they are doing their appointed and right common task. As we just discussed, the moral character of two states was changed by such efforts.

Needs on the Canadian and American frontiers prompted local cooperative efforts to enable Christians to do what cannot be done individually. Christians there recognized how similar they were when they needed each other; even Christians of groups with relatively many disagreements were serving together. These Christians overlooked these overall minor differences to do together what could not be done individually. Because of such acting in unity, they were able to do Hebrews 10:24-5 among themselves - and by so doing, they did a chunk of Matthew 28:19-20 beyond themselves, and expanded church influence for Christ from coast to coast in two big countries.

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<sup>1</sup> in Matlins, Magida, How to Be a Perfect Stranger, page 353.

<sup>2</sup> A. Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, page 66.

<sup>3</sup> Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

<sup>4</sup> B. W. Stone, Rogers, The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself, with..., page 37.

<sup>5</sup> Vos, Exploring Church History, page 135.

<sup>6</sup> Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, page 204.

<sup>7</sup> It is not right for factious church groups to hope for revival at 'their place' when they are unwilling to have the Lord's stated priorities be their priorities. Often, the desire is for the growth of the faction, and/or faction 'bragging rights.' When such hopes for 'revival' are made prayer, the factionists "ask amiss" (ASV) -- James 4:1-3. The Lord's priorities need to be their priorities.

*Lesson #2 of 2: Third World Evangelism*

We can learn some things from what is happening in other parts of the world in the decades surrounding 2000. At John 17:20-1a, Jesus prayed while enduring His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Jesus Christ said at Matthew 28:19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (NASB). We are to be united as one, and seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Spiritism and Spiritism + nominal Catholicism<sup>1n</sup> have been common religions in the southern part of the Third World. In 1930 Brazil, Pentecostals<sup>2n</sup> had only 267 places of worship, but by the end of the 1900's, Pentecostals composed between 10% and 20% of the entire Brazilian population.<sup>3</sup> In just Third World countries, Pentecostal groups had 150 million people among them as of 1999.<sup>4</sup> Pentecostalism began 1901 in Topeka, Kansas<sup>5</sup> and burst out at the 1906 Azusa Street Revival. Within a century, out of the world population of around six billion people, Third World Pentecostals were over 2% of the world's population.<sup>6n</sup> Third World Pentecostals are winning great numbers to Christ.

At a symposium on Pentecostalism with leaders from Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal groups in 1965 Brazil, Pentecostals noted that Pentecostal evangelism must include these qualities: "It does not confine itself to soul-saving" and "It can only be effective in an ecumenical context."<sup>7</sup> Church groups rally around efforts to help people with day-to-day needs.<sup>8</sup> Pentecostal groups do not agree with each other or with non-Pentecostal Christian groups, but still work with other Christian groups in benevolence evangelism matching Matthew 5:16 "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (ASV). Growth numbers of Third World Pentecostals testify to the merits of doing the Lord's work *the ways He told us to do it.*<sup>9n</sup>

Whom Church Is About – A Lesson from Modern Growth

Per Acts 11:26, Christians were originally called "disciples," in that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (NASB); μαθητας "disciples" is also translated "followers" (ICB). At Matthew 16, Jesus was talking with His disciples, and we pick up at Matthew 16:15-8

"`But what about you?' he asked. `Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, `You are the [Christ], the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, `Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it'" (TNIV|ASV|TNIV).

<sup>1</sup> Mixing Catholic elements into other religions is common in Latin America.\* Even if Spiritists identify as Christians, they are not Christians -- they are Spiritists.

\* Molloy, Experiencing the World's Religions, page 371.

<sup>2</sup> The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is an oft-used target that charlatans abuse for personal gain. However, not all within this movement are such -- including leaders.

North American Pentecostalism with its glitz threatens to pass off such glitz as an ideal norm, which financially-struggling Third World places can ill-afford financially to emulate.\* It would be best if many wealthier Pentecostals would exhibit the Christian quality of self-restraint in the area of extravagance.

It is important to note that many Pentecostals find the excesses of radical Pentecostals embarrassing.\*\* The excesses should not characterize all Pentecostals.

\* D. J. Garrard article in Burgess, Van Der Maas, New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, page 276.

\*\* Tracy, Ingersol, What is a Nazarene, page 150.

<sup>3</sup> Shaull, Cesar, Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches, page 8.

<sup>4</sup> Shaull, Cesar, Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches, pages 11, 233.

<sup>5</sup> Synan, The Century of the Holy Spirit, page 3.

<sup>6</sup> This is more than some major world religions. In mid-1999, Judaism, Shintoism, Jainism, and Confucianism each had under 15 million -- World Almanac...2001, page 692.

<sup>7</sup> Hollenweger, The Pentecostals, page 101.

<sup>8</sup> Shaull, Cesar, Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches, page 101.

<sup>9</sup> When Brethren evangelism's focus went from benevolence to gospel meetings, they had fewer results -- N. Smith, Roots, Renewal, and the Brethren, page 90.



It is commonly known that "Peter" is a transliteration of one Greek word for "rock" and "rock" translates another Greek word and that this was a Greek word play.<sup>1n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "small stone" and πέτρα means "foundation boulder."<sup>2</sup> Jesus said He would "build My church" (NBV) on the πέτρα, what was just said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (NBV). This is the premise upon which the church is built: that truth that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God.<sup>3n</sup> Greek translated "church" is εκκλησια; in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly to discuss the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ ordained His church as a community of His followers, and members thereof would follow His teachings.

After His death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ said in Matthew 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations |. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, | and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB|NCV|NASB). Note the "I **have taught** you" - He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. Jesus Christ expected His followers to follow and perpetuate what He had taught in all four gospels and Acts 20:35.

At Matthew 28:19-20, Christ told His apostles to "teach them to obey everything that I have taught you" and they did that. Per Acts 2:42, after the inaugural sermon of the church, those in the church "devoted themselves to the apostles' | doctrine" (ESV|KJV, NKJV). The "apostles' doctrine" would have simply been what Christ preached and taught during His earthly ministry. The apostle Paul showed this when he reported at 1 Corinthians 4:17 "principles of behavior | in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (NBV|ESV) - he alluded to this at Acts 20:35. These "principles of behavior in Christ" would have been what Christ is documented teaching in all four gospels. These things composed "the apostles' doctrine" which was taught "everywhere in every church."

Now, as for other subjects, those within Christ's church were expected to have differences in religious thought. Paul wrote in Romans 14:1-13a

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but |do not| argue about opinions.| One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we 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 - and were expected to continue to have - differing beliefs on religious details unrelated to Christ's teachings.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

Still, Paul insisted that Jesus Christ's teachings have 'center stage' in the church, and he knew that there was harmful desire to delve off into unrelated areas. He stated at 1 Timothy 1:5 that "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (NASB). At 1 Timothy 6:3-4a he warned

"If anyone advocates a **different doctrine** and **does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life**, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in **disputes**" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

If anyone pushes "different doctrine" which "does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life" then s/he "is conceited and understands nothing." Greek under "does not adhere to" is negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."<sup>1</sup> **The problem with the teaching is just that it is "different";** non-contradiction and accuracy/inaccuracy are irrelevant. **What we teach should not stray from the subject of godly overall life nor from the "words" of Jesus Christ.** The doctrine we teach should not delve off into areas that He is not documented speaking on<sup>2n</sup>; the doctrine we teach should focus on what He actually spoke.

The New Testament Gospels: The gospels were not written for historical curiosity. They were written so that Christians could know what Jesus Christ taught in "words" of Jesus Christ.

Many church groups and related groups claim their focus is on Jesus Christ - but often, their overall real focus is this: what they think or 'infer' Christ's will is in matters He is not documented saying anything about.<sup>3n</sup> This focus is on their own teachings<sup>4n</sup> and is unbecoming the Lord's church.<sup>5n</sup>

The 1880-1910 United States shows what can happen when the church focuses on Jesus Christ. A group of new denominations that focus on Jesus Christ formed which includes the Evangelical Covenant Church and Evangelical Free Church.<sup>6</sup> These two denominations are in a set of denominations which is the fastest growing in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> as the 21<sup>st</sup> century opens.<sup>8n</sup> Other than Bible belief, these two denominations have minimal amounts of other distinctive insisted-on beliefs.

This parallels the New Testament, which show the church growing rapidly while it biblically accepted difference of thought and while it kept its focus on Jesus Christ. Quite unsurprisingly, operating church congregations and church groups in Bible ways has encountered Bible results. ■

<sup>1</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

<sup>2</sup> Sadly, many factionists expect others to go with them into such delving. People who wish to simply be Christians get lowly-regarded as 'half-hearted' or 'less mature spiritually.' Some get treated as 'unfaithful.' It is wrong that Christians who are fixated just on Christ's teachings are often given little place by church people.

<sup>3</sup> If any such subject truly affected Christian quality, surely Christ would have said something about it, and surely His divinely-guided secretaries would have recorded it.

<sup>4</sup> Sadly, many such groups claim they are 'just Christians' and draw people who want to be just Christians. However, they expect people to 'grow' to adopt additional tenets. For any Christian who does not adopt such additional tenets, they not only think s/he is wrong, but they also view that Christian as 'less than what s/he ought to be.'

<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what Jesus reproved with "in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (ESV) at Matthew 15:6-9.

<sup>6</sup> D. Olson, The American Church in Crisis, pages 187, 236.

<sup>7</sup> D. Olson, The American Church in Crisis, pages 102.

<sup>8</sup> The Barna Group around c. 2000 researched and found: unbelievers in the United States commonly view Christians as not representative of Jesus.\* I did not need the research for me to know this; I already knew this from some of the things I have known unbelievers to say and write as their reasons to reject the church.

The fact this note refers to especially relates to what one minister who extensively interviewed unbelievers reports: for unbelievers to be more open to the church, they want the church to teach about Jesus more.\*\* This is supposed to be His church, and it is disgraceful that this has become the case.

\* Kinnaman, Lyons, unchristian, page 15 -- unconventional grammar original.

\*\* Kimball, They Like Jesus but Not the Church, page 228.

*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.<sup>1n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup>

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 word<sup>4n</sup> is: in ancient Greek culture, it was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup> 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 precept<sup>7n</sup> gets added by the Lord to the one church.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, please see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

<sup>5</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> 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.,<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4n</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> That Hebrew term also referred to the general gathering of God's people without any set purpose.<sup>7</sup> It was

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Hodges, Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, page 582.

<sup>4</sup> 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."

<sup>5</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 42 NT.

<sup>7</sup> In Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 73.

used at Acts 7:38<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup> 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.*<sup>4</sup> Mortals do **not** set boundaries of the 'one body' by choices of mutual 'fellowship' or rejection.<sup>5n</sup>

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].<sup>6n</sup>

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.*

<sup>1</sup> In Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 76.

<sup>2</sup> Pointed out by A. Campbell, The Christian System, page 77.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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 διχοστασια "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'<sup>1n</sup> *is still being factious.*<sup>2n</sup>

*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.<sup>3n</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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"<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

### 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.<sup>4</sup> His imagination did not cease with creation. Human beings have so many ways to be varied that no human being is not unique.<sup>5</sup> Diversity was part of God's design from when Creation was new and "good,"<sup>6</sup> 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.,<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> Noted by Webb, In Search of Christian Unity, page 10.

<sup>4</sup> Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, pages 101-2.

<sup>5</sup> Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

<sup>6</sup> Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> They offer a variety of contexts for people to get to know the Lord,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

<sup>2</sup> Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 102.

<sup>3</sup> Posterski, Reinventing Evangelism, page 103.



Scripture never tells congregations to have uniformity.<sup>1n</sup> 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,<sup>2n</sup> 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.'

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> **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 διχοστασια "standing apart"<sup>1</sup> 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 διχοστασια "standing apart"<sup>2</sup> 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."

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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].

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<sup>1</sup> 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  $\text{ὁμῶν}$ , 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,<sup>1n</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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"<sup>1n</sup>  
(ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> "Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.  
<sup>2</sup> 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"<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and ends "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV); διχοστασια is literally "standing apart"<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4n</sup> Scripture was produced by God, and God produced it for a purpose. 2 Timothy 3:16-7 describes Scripture with

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>2</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup>

Because all of Scripture is God's written Word, it is the highest Word on any subject it addresses.<sup>2n</sup> 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."<sup>3n</sup>

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."<sup>4n</sup> It is a comprehensive treatise on "all good work," and that is its subject matter.<sup>5n</sup>

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"<sup>6n</sup>  
(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."

<sup>1</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

<sup>2</sup> Part 5/Doctrine and Its Importance explains how "doctrine" is about overall living and about Jesus Christ Himself.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> "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"<sup>1</sup>/clique and "choosing."<sup>2</sup> 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 pursuits<sup>3n</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup> To use Scripture as grounds for uncharitable activity toward people<sup>5n</sup> is to misuse Scripture in ways that are directly contrary to its purpose. To use Scripture as grounds for sin<sup>6n</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>2</sup> Vine et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

<sup>5</sup> This is beyond just claiming that someone is wrong on something and giving reasons.

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2n</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2n</sup> 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  <b>sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ</b>, and with the <b>doctrine</b> conforming to  <b>a godly life</b> , 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.

<sup>1</sup> NLT Study Bible, page 1581.

<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV); διχοστασια literally means "standing apart."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> and ends with "drunkenness |, orgies" (ASV | TNIV); διχσοστασια literally means "standing apart."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup> "Peter" is Πητρος and "rock" is πετρα. Πητρος means "a small stone" and πετρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5n</sup>

The word "church" translates εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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"<sup>2</sup>/clique and "choosing."<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

<sup>2</sup> A. Campbell, The Christian System, pages 76-7.

<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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.'

<sup>1</sup> Trueblood, The People Called Quakers, page 105.



This includes the handful of hours we assemble in church congregations.<sup>1n</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and ends with “drunkenness|, orgies” (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια literally means “standing apart.”<sup>3</sup> 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.’<sup>4n</sup> This is still conduct of division in the church. Greek διχοστασια “standing apart”<sup>5</sup> 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.,<sup>6</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>6</sup> 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 task<sup>1n</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> 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"<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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'<sup>1n</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Even without explicit governance, sometimes political manipulations among a group's respected institutions enforce conformity to `expectations,'<sup>3</sup> as do social pressures.<sup>4n</sup> 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.<sup>5n</sup>

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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Whalen, Separated Brethren, page 114.

<sup>3</sup> C. Allen, Things Unseen: Churches of Christ In (and After) The Modern Age, page 193.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>†</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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,<sup>2n</sup> 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'<sup>3n</sup> 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:

<sup>1</sup> Any church congregation neglecting this purpose neglects its reason to exist.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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,<sup>2n</sup> 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"<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> The idea 'presence always implies approval' is a human notion not taught by Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>1</sup> 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"<sup>2</sup> and is translated "followers" in the ICB. Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers.

Jesus Christ ordained His εκκλησια, 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 εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>3</sup> 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"<sup>4</sup> and is translated "followers" in the ICB. Hence, in a basic biblical meaning of "Christian," the Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This Greek usage of εκκλησια is that the church is the community of Jesus Christ's followers.

#### 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.

<sup>1</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>3</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> It appears only at Luke 12:51 and the sense there is "strife" <sup>2</sup> contrasted to "peace" <sup>3</sup> 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 2:44<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> A Christian is

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT.

<sup>4</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>5</sup> 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,"<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> In Scofield, The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Authorized Version; with..., page 1242.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 word<sup>1n</sup> is this: in ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup> 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"<sup>5</sup> 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."**<sup>6</sup>

Scripture is given so that Christians can be "entirely instructed for all good work."<sup>7n</sup> From the Scriptures, we can be "entirely instructed" on what to DO to "keep the unity" the church should have.

<sup>1</sup> For more discussion, see Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church".

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>3</sup> Pointed out by Geisler, Howe, Big Book of Bible Difficulties, page 428.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>6</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruido para toda buena obra" translated.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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"<sup>4</sup> 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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα. Πέτρος means "a small stone" and πέτρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3n</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup>

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)<sup>4n</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> We will not consider speculations about conjectured Aramaic conversations. Greek was common in Palestine, <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, page 1423.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3n</sup> 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.<sup>4n</sup> For the church to do as the Lord intended in matters of disagreement, it will help to accept this: *DISAGREEMENT IS NOT DIVISION*.

<sup>1</sup> Hence, teaching that we should all agree on religious details is contrary to Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2n</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>2</sup> 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"<sup>1</sup> translated from εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used about the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> That Hebrew term also referred to the general gathering of God's people without any set purpose.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church".

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 42 NT.

<sup>4</sup> In Renn, Expository Dictionary, pages 73, 76.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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 distinctives<sup>2n</sup> -- 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.

<sup>1</sup> Rather than fight worldly matters entirely unfriendly to Christ's values, some choose lighter targets: persons who are already following Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> 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 epistle<sup>1n</sup> 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,<sup>2+n</sup> 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-important<sup>3n</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.**

<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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"<sup>2</sup> 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*

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Stamps, *Biblia de Estudio Vida Plena*, page 1746 "esforzarse intensamente."

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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*<sup>1</sup> in this list there is a Greek word διχοστασια<sup>2</sup> which literally means a "standing apart."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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"<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6n</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; In Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1126.

<sup>4</sup> Hodges, Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, page 582.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; In Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1126.

<sup>6</sup> 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)<sup>1n</sup>; 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.<sup>2n</sup> 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,"<sup>3</sup> 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 διχοστασια<sup>4</sup> "standing apart"<sup>5</sup> 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,"<sup>6</sup> and refers to acts of disassociation against others. Christians are to stay away from church people who try to cause Christians to dissociate.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> **Their loyalty to Christ was right -- but what they did for it was not. There are wrong ways to promote right things.**

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>4</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>6</sup> 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"<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2n</sup> Still, not only was censuring happening along with deeming Christians 'unacceptable,' but so also was διχοστασια literally "standing apart."<sup>3</sup> *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.***

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.'

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> "Peter" is Πέτρος and "rock" is πέτρα.<sup>2n</sup> Πέτρος means "small stone" and πέτρα means "foundation boulder."<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6n</sup> 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).

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, page 1423.

<sup>4</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, page 240.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 171 NT.

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> The purpose is stated before the command to not abandon church assembly,<sup>2n</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup>**

**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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> Pride-motivated desire to be agreed with causes hostile quarrels; personal contempt over disagreement causes setting aside God's priority of good deeds.<sup>3n</sup> 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.<sup>4n</sup> 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,<sup>5</sup> and ends "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια is "standing apart,"<sup>6</sup> 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"<sup>7n</sup> is someone seeking factions<sup>8n</sup> rallied off-task on "unprofitable" disputes.

<sup>1</sup> ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV.

<sup>2</sup> People who oppose servants of Christ for religious precepts are especially affected.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Pointed out in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1126.

<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>†</sup> 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.

<sup>†</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 303 NT.

<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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"<sup>3n</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Misusing Scripture by involving it in prohibited "fruitless discussion" does not change "fruitless discussion" into anything better. It simply adds to the wrong.

<sup>2</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>†</sup> 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.

<sup>†</sup>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."<sup>1n</sup> 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,"<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3n</sup> 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."

<sup>1</sup> Again, this does not mean we cannot think someone is wrong nor say so.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>1n</sup>

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."

<sup>1</sup> 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 us<sup>1n</sup> *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."

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<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>††</sup> 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."<sup>†††</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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"<sup>1n</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>†</sup> 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.

<sup>†</sup>Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 303 NT.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 era<sup>2</sup> - 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.

<sup>1</sup> In Blackaby, et al, The Blackaby Study Bible, page 1435.

<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>1n</sup> "Church" translates εκκλησια, used in Greek culture about the community of followers of Pythagoras,<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4n</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> Such practice is foreign to outside Christians.

For functional unity to happen, we will need to forsake the human tradition of agreement-focused factiousness.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt, Christian Is the Name of the Church, page 322.

<sup>6</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, page 240.

<sup>7</sup> Jenkins, The Next Christendom, page 90.

<sup>8</sup> Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South, page 14.

<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> "Peter" is Πητρος and "rock" is πετρα. Πητρος means "a small stone" and πετρα means "a foundation boulder."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4n</sup> 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"<sup>5n</sup> - He instructed His followers to perpetuate what He had taught *up to that time*. Jesus Christ expected His followers to follow and perpetuate<sup>6n</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup> The word usually translated "church" is εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly to discuss the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, page 1423.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Vine, et al, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, page 171 NT.

<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>1n</sup>

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,<sup>2n</sup> 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,<sup>3n</sup> 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,"<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5n</sup>

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"<sup>6</sup> – 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.

<sup>1</sup> The "apostles' doctrine" is what maintained unity in the New Testament-era church.

--Noted by Holloway, Foster, *Renewing God's People*, page 13.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1257.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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 διχοστασια<sup>1</sup> "standing apart"<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3n</sup> 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"<sup>4n</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> The word usually translated "church" is εκκλησια. In ancient Greek culture, the word was used similarly to discuss the community of followers of Pythagoras.<sup>6</sup> 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,<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 179 NT; in Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 18:15-7, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 1 Corinthians 5:11 are such cases.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 171 NT.

<sup>6</sup> Arndt, Gingrich, et al, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, page 240.

<sup>7</sup> Vine et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 42 NT.

As the Lord's church, we have a job to do.<sup>1n</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> 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 Commission<sup>3n</sup> 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.<sup>4n</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and there is concern if Christ's prayer for oneness of the church has been met.<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> In McManners, *The Oxford History of Christianity*, page 649-50.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Moore's contribution in *Brethren's Tracts and Pamphlets, The*, page *The Perfect Plan of Salvation* 25.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Draper's contribution in Cabal, *Apologetics Study Bible*, page 1709.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup> 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.

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).

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*:

"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).

<sup>1</sup> '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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2n</sup>

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 commodity<sup>3n</sup>; only in the 1500's did this begin to change anywhere.<sup>4n</sup> What is the purpose of Scripture? 2 Timothy 3:16-7 says

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Stanley, *Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible*, page 1478.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Often pointed out by Orthodox and Catholic apologists, but for a different reason.

<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2n</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>\*</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> ESV|KJV, NKJV|NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 "enteramente instruído para toda buena obra" translated.

<sup>2</sup> 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.**

<sup>3</sup> 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-motived<sup>1n</sup> -- 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 effort<sup>2n</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> In this fallen world, what is needed is for Jesus Christ's teachings to be followed and promoted.<sup>2n</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4n</sup> 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,"<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, page 171 NT.

<sup>4</sup> For details, please see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>1n</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3n</sup> 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. ■*

<sup>1</sup> For details, please see *Part 5/The Bible Meaning of "Church"*.

<sup>2</sup> JPS 1985|margin.

<sup>3</sup> For details, see *Part 4/The Basics of Salvation* and *Part 4/What All This Means*.

## *Epilogue: What the Church Could Be Like in Unity*

### *Essay 1 of 2: Considering Scripture*

Romans 14:1-13a says:

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but do not argue about opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.' So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. So let us no longer censure one another" (NASB|ICB|PEB|NASB|NBV).

This shows that Christians are expected to have differing beliefs on religious details. Notions that Christians should not have religious disagreement are contrary to Scripture.

There are two passages that tell us something very important about the significance that these disagreements are to have among us:

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 those who have believed God may be careful to devote themselves to good deeds. These things are good and profitable unto men: but shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned" <sup>1n</sup> (ESV|ASV|ESV|NLT 1996, RSV 1952|ASV).

This warns of "factious" people with "morbid interest in disputes." Greek under "factious man" is translated "heretick" <sup>2n</sup> in the KJV. 'Heresies' transliterates αἵρεσις plural for "party"<sup>3</sup>/clique and "choosing."<sup>4</sup> This is someone so fixated on an "unprofitable" dispute that s/he seeks a religious faction/party rallied around a chosen side of that dispute. The dispute is "unprofitable" because it is irrelevant to "godly life" and "good deeds."

<sup>1</sup> "Law" = Old Testament Jewish worship code, still approved then for Jewish-Christians.

<sup>2</sup> Disjoint from church definition, Greek transliterated "heresies" in the KJV is not plural for 'disliked view' or 'religious error,' but rather simply a clique/"party."\* It also means "choosing."† This is intentional choice, not accidental mistake.

\* A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, pages 76-7.

† Vine, et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 303 NT

<sup>3</sup> A. Campbell, *The Christian System*, pages 76-7.

<sup>4</sup> Vine et al, *Expository Dictionary*, page 303 NT.

These two passages are helpful. Romans 14 tells us that Christians are expected to have differing beliefs on details of religion – these disagreements are not commanded, but they are expected. Disagreement was expected and allowed for in Scripture. Disagreement gives potential for dispute, even if it is nothing more than an exchange of discordant ideas. 1 Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 3:8-11 both warn against fixation on disputes irrelevant to “a godly life” and “good deeds.” Per these two passages, we are not to let any such disagreements get in the way of “a godly life” and “good deeds.”

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of “works of the flesh” (ASV) = “wrong things the sinful self does” (ICB) that starts with “sexual immorality” (ESV), includes “idolatry, sorcery” (ASV), has διχοστασια,<sup>1</sup> and ends with “drunkenness, orgies” (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια is “standing apart.”<sup>2</sup> This refers to acts of dividing from others; such conduct is among the carnal sins that we mortals tend toward. Greek διχοστασια “standing apart”<sup>3</sup> = ‘engaging in acts of dividing’ is listed among and between sinful actions that are widely known in the church to be serious matters. Greek διχοστασια “standing apart”<sup>4</sup> = ‘engaging in acts of dividing’ cannot be treated any differently.

When we consider this among such passages as the previous ones, we see that if we allow disagreements irrelevant to “a godly life” and “good deeds” to induce us to engage in actions contrary to Scripture, we increase our wrong. If we allow such “unprofitable” disagreements to prompt us to engage in διχοστασια “standing apart”<sup>5</sup> = ‘engage in an act of dividing,’ we have increased our wrong in the same way.

Unlike uses of Scripture alleged to ‘clearly’ support a ‘side’ in c. 2000 disputes that have fueled of dividing, Scripture passages addressing this behavior itself are truly clear. That lack of ambiguity makes sense given Scripture’s purpose; per 2 Timothy 3:16-7, Scripture is given “so that the| person who serves God| may be complete,| entirely instructed for all good work.”<sup>6</sup> Scripture is given to promote doing what is good, not satisfy religious curiosity. Unlike the ambiguous disputes, Scripture passages against strife-disputes and factiousness can be understood both rightly and simply.

When enough Christians accept what is wrong and desire to remedy it rightly, a church future like that outlined below will be possible. However, accepting these biblical truths is a necessity if the church is to become predominantly like the model described below. Many attitudes will need to be changed, and difficult decisions will be necessary. Many, many people will need to decide to do what is right even when it is contrary to their own desires or to the desires of people they esteem. Jesus Christ said at Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two| lords”<sup>7</sup> because “he will support the one and despise the other” (NBV). Jesus Christ is not open to mixed loyalties when it comes to Him, and many need to accept this truth in meaningful ways. The vague sketch below for how the church could function in the future is doable – and in great conformity with Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>5</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.

<sup>6</sup> NBV|ICB|ASV|RVR 1909 “enteramente instruido para toda buena obra” translated.

<sup>7</sup> ICB|RVR 1909, 1960, 1995 señores” translated.

*Essay 2 of 2: What a Positive Response Would Involve*

Galatians 5:19-21 has a list of "works of the flesh" (ASV) = "wrong things the sinful self does" (ICB) that starts with "fornication" (ASV), includes such things as "idolatry, sorcery" (ASV), has διχοστασια,<sup>1</sup> and ends with "drunkenness|, orgies" (ASV|TNIV). Greek διχοστασια is "standing apart"<sup>2</sup> and refers to acts of dividing.

In a future where everything on this list is treated consistently, avoidance of engaging in division would be treated as something everyone has a role in -- not just 'everyone else.' Just as every Christian is called to keep away from sexually immoral behavior, false gods, sorcery, getting drunk, or engaging in depraved parties, every Christian would see a responsibility to keep away from engaging in division.

Christians would fight this sinful tendency in the face of any type of disagreement. They would do so without compromise to their fleshly lust.

Christians would remember that Jesus Christ and serving Him come first. They would not let any disagreement distract our shared obligation to serve Him.

Romans 14 shows that even in the New Testament-era church, disagreement was expected. Disagreement will never be banished from the church in the natural universe. If we all agreed and were right, we would be agreed upon perfect knowledge. Christians are human. We desire to know ever the better about our interests, which means we seek perfect knowledge in those areas. As Christians, we seek perfect knowledge in religious matters. As humans, we are incapable of perfect knowledge. Therefore, in our efforts as Christians to learn knowledge as perfect as we can, our imperfections will keep all of us from knowing perfectly -- eliminating any chance for agreement upon perfect knowledge. Disagreement is due to all Christians' imperfections; in our future, we humbly accept this.

In study of Scripture, all disagreeing groups and individuals in Christ' church would study together in a desire to mutually benefit each other, rather than in a spirit of rivalry. The purpose of their study together has become for all involved to learn and/or derive the best understandings of Scripture -- not to defend preconceived party-line tenets or to 'one up' each other. The listening is full, as opposed to selectively for opportunities of exploitation in self-promotion campaigns or debates. The listening is in all directions. Regardless of who points out what, every reasonable point raised by a servant of Jesus Christ is considered for its merits, and adopted if correct. No viewpoint is exempt from reconsideration when relevant. When it is evident that a particular discussion over a disagreement is no longer productive for servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we agree to disagree with all charitableness to each other and continue to serve Him together. We do so remembering that disagreement has been expected in the church since even before the writing of the New Testament was finished.

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<sup>1</sup> Pointed out in Renn, Expository Dictionary, page 294.

<sup>2</sup> Vine, et al, Expository Dictionary, page 179 NT; in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1126.



As our congregations continue to disagree, we do not let this hinder efforts in our shared task to serve Christ. In 1998, ecumenical partnerships between denominations<sup>1n</sup> were at an all-time high<sup>2</sup>; in our future, we make this local among our congregations in each locality, and have also grown this into a church-wide phenomenon. Locally, congregations of one denomination/'fellowship'/'brotherhood' who can somehow benefit an outside congregation gladly offer what they can. Congregations of a denomination/'fellowship'/'brotherhood' who need assistance do accept it from outside groups or from individual Christians similar to outside groups. Rather than party-line religious tenets, desire for each others' well-being motivated by our common loyalty to Jesus Christ comes first in Christians' and congregations' dealings with each other.<sup>3n</sup>

Individuals in a formal congregation or in a similar group are not treated as disreputable persons just for matters of disagreement. It is remembered that they are fellow servants of Jesus Christ, and they are valued for that.

In congregations and ministry endeavors, people do not pester ministers, leaders, teachers or other workers over religious disagreement. They respect that these servants of Jesus Christ have more important concerns. Personal religious opinions are left unexpressed when doing otherwise would be disruptive. Even in disagreement, Christians submit to each other and mutually respect each other as fitting for healthy operations of their congregations.

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, official denomination mergers would be cumbersome, and are unneeded anyway. Acts 2:47b examples how "the Lord added to them day by day those |who were being saved" (ASV|NASB). All Christians are added to one church by Jesus Christ, and they are all in one church regardless of human formalities.

If haggling over mergers causes distraction from Jesus Christ's larger priorities for His church, such haggling should just be abandoned. A denomination is not always a division, and need not be a division-faction; a denomination can simply be an association of congregations. Even if a denomination began as a faction, it need not disband if it is no longer factious; it can continue to exist as an association of congregations.

<sup>2</sup> In Crow, Duke, The Church for Disciples of Christ, page 7.

<sup>3</sup> The 1801 Cane Ridge Revival at the Cane Ridge Meeting House is an important event in the annals of efforts for church unity. At the 1952 Annual Cane Ridge Meeting, Baptist minister Edwin T. Dahlberg noted that we have international cooperation, but "more often than not it is a case of governments and peoples keeping *themselves* warm. They are thinking in terms of return. From a secular point of view this may be legitimate. But it does not begin to be on the same level with brotherhood in Christ, which is self-denying, and willing to lose its life from Christ's sake."\*

In secular cooperation, normally what is intended is what each party has to gain for themselves. It should not be that way among Christians.

Rather than think 'What is in it for us?' as we ponder cooperation, Christians should think 'What benefit can this have for the cause of Jesus Christ and serving Him?' We should be prepared to give up whatever wishes we might have in order to cooperate best to the service of Jesus Christ.

This includes material goods, and also desires to advance favorite religious precepts. As Christians, serving Jesus Christ must come first to us.

\*Edwin T. Dahlberg article in Thompson, Voices from Cane Ridge, page 219.

In the decades surrounding 2000, most denominations/fellowships/brotherhoods' allowed disagreement among themselves within the confines of their party-line religious tenets and for interpretations of the book of Revelation. In our future, we have become consistent and are extending this to all Christians and for interpretations of all Scripture.

People who have disbelieved the Bible, or failed to value the Bible as it ought to be, have seen their mistake. Jesus Christ said to people with access to Scripture at Matthew 22:29 "You don't understand because you don't know what the Scriptures say" (ICB), and as of c. 2000 there were church groups that did little Bible teaching and thereby contributed to this Christ-disapproved status.<sup>1</sup> In our future, this has been corrected; all congregations teach the Bible extensively, and rightly teach its precepts about unity.

Persons who insist upon initiating acts of division or unkind deeds on basis of disagreement are not accommodated. This is the case regardless of such persons' religious tenets, financial contributions, support of leadership's agendas, or status among a congregation. It is acknowledged that they are sinning, and if they persist in trying to make it a church matter, they are addressed as sinners.

A Christian's faithfulness is judged by how s/he follows Christ's values in overall life, rather than whose religious tenets s/he agrees with in matters of disagreement. It is like this at all times, whether it be away from church assembly or at church assembly.

When people are needed to do tasks for the Lord, they are chosen for faithfulness to Christ and His values, and their qualifications to do the actual task itself. It is this way always, including in benevolence, or in outreach – and outreach is focused toward non-Christians instead of other Christians. Endeavors to make disciples for Jesus Christ are unadulterated by factious efforts to make Christians into converts to some group.

Regardless of denomination/fellowship/brotherhood,' we like to see signs that a congregation is thriving. We like to see congregations of Christ's servants faring well.

Congregations make resources they can contribute available to other congregations regardless of denomination/fellowship/brotherhood' to assist in the service of the Lord. Pooling of resources to facilitate the best service for the Lord is common.

Regardless of disagreement, congregations in a locality see a duty to share the work of the Lord there locally. This duty has a higher priority than to 'carry their part' to support an agenda for a denomination/fellowship/brotherhood' in a region. Regardless of who agrees with whom and on what, congregations of a locality maintain at least slightly stronger cooperative and fellowship ties to other congregations in their locality than to congregations outside their locality.

In this design for a future of the church of Christians, disagreements are never allowed to distract from seeking and doing the best for the Lord and His people. Unfortunately, as of c. 2000, the church overall is a long way from this. Still, the reader is invited to wistfully imagine how wonderful it would be if Jesus Christ, His values, His people, and His work would all be given first importance throughout all of His church. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Kroll, [Back to the Bible](#), pages 65 and 67.

### A Personal Urging to Action

I was raised by Christian parents. In elementary school, I liked to read books of Bible stories. In fifth grade, I got my first Bible. It was an *International Children's Bible* and I enjoyed it throughout fifth grade.

In junior high, I became more interested in natural science about space starting in seventh grade. In eighth grade, I came to think that there was a natural explanation for everything. I decided that religion was nothing more than a primal instinct of humans to comfort themselves about a 'pre-scientifically unexplainable' universe by putting 'superhumans' in control. I believed that there were no gods, that religious thought was a primal instinct from ignorance, and that it must be resisted. I was an atheist.<sup>1n</sup>

My parents decided the whole family would go to church regularly. The places they took us to were buildings of a church group that was very factious then. I did not learn much about things of the Lord at these places for two reasons. First, as an atheist, I cared little about what was being talked about, and did not listen much. Second, when I was listening, most of what I heard was disparagements of other Christian groups<sup>2n</sup> – usually Baptists. I knew little of Christianity at the time, so when nearly everything I heard was the 'errors' and 'faults' of 'everyone else,' I learned little about what is involved with becoming and being a Christian.

I did know one thing. I had read enough of Christ's teachings to know that 'right place'/'wrong place' on Sunday morning had nothing to do with whether or not a person was a Christian. The ICB uses "followers" where the King James Version has "disciples." I knew that in Scripture, being a follower of Jesus Christ made a person a Christian. It was strange to me that preachers who urged their congregations to 'go with just the Bible' thought a follower of Jesus Christ was a non-Christian based on where s/he was on Sunday morning.

While in high school, I was still being compulsively taken to these buildings, but a friend was inviting me also to youth events hosted by the Baptist congregation his father was pastor of. While I did not have a great interest in the Bible lessons, the events had fun activities. By April of 1993, when I was 16 years old, I could no longer accept that everything 'just happens,' so I realized that there had to be at least one god.

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<sup>1</sup> Atheism does not involve worship of any deity, but does have religious beliefs.

In my experience there seem to be two main types of self-designated 'atheists': a) those who claim to be such for convenience or emotional reasons, and b) real atheists. The former type often seek self-promotion and/or loathe theistic religion, religious morality, religious people, and/or God. Those of the real type truly think that there really are no gods. This was my category.

On a personal note, the type of militant 'atheists' who have become a societal problem as of c. 2000 was alien to my experience. I have known well one other real atheist. It was never upsetting to either of us when religious people practiced their religion in the presence of either of us. It never occurred to me to get upset. I simply viewed the worshippers as deluded. I assumed it to be a right of civilized society that people should be allowed free peaceful expression of whatever their religion. As I did not believe in any gods, worship of God was totally meaningless to me. I even sometimes went along with it to be polite, as I believed worship acts to be totally meaningless.

As of c. 2000, there is an upsurge of 'atheists' who adamantly oppose any non-disapproval of theistic religion or non-disapproval just of Christianity. It does not take approval to make them hostile: any level of respect toward theistic religion or just Christianity is unacceptable to them. Their religious intolerance is so deep that they seek to prevent others from free expression of their religion -- even if it does not genuinely affect them. I skeptically think: 'If you truly think God does not exist, why does it mean so much to you that no respect is shown to worship of Him? It never bothered me.'

<sup>2</sup> Since that time, this focus has ceased to exist at these specific places.

I originally planned to make a hybrid religion from a consensus of `major' moral world religions, but came to realize that I ought to be a Christian. On the morning of Thursday, June 17, 1993, in the pastor's office of that Baptist congregation, the youth pastor explained to me that getting a baptism ceremony for myself would not save me. It was shown to me from Scripture that we cannot and will not be saved by our own efforts to follow the Lord. It was shown to me why Christ died. All people are guilty of sins, which a just God cannot allow to go unpunished. Still, God wanted us mortals to be saved. Therefore, God made a plan. Jesus Christ came to this earth in a human body. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, so He had no sins of His own to be punished for, and therefore could die to bear the penalty for our sins. It was shown to me that to be saved, a person needs to trust in Christ's death for salvation.<sup>1n</sup> It was explained to me that to be saved, a person must have a genuine faith that leads the person to follow the Lord.<sup>2n</sup> I was told to decide whether or not I would come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and right then and there I decided to.

I began assembling with that Baptist congregation. It was my church home for five years and a few months.<sup>3n</sup> I thought it was strange that so many servants of Christ minimized their dealings, fellowship, and cooperation with each other on the basis of church congregation.<sup>4n</sup>

With this congregation, I was in Sunday School and would often go to evening service in addition to the morning service. In private study, which I tried to do daily, I was prone to go through New Testament books, and write what I understood them to be saying verse-by-verse. I also studied about the books of the Bible, picking up a lot of background information. I was learning a lot about Scripture very quickly. Before long, I was interested in subjects that Christians debate over, wanting to see if I could `solve' those disputes.

I began studying these disputed matters in efforts to `solve' those disputes. 1 Timothy 6:4 has an often-unnoticed reproof of people "obsessed with disputes" (NKJV). No one warned me that becoming unduly interested in arguments and disputes is not wise. To the contrary, it was encouraged; to become `grounded in the Word of God' regarding such disputes was considered `growing to maturity in the meat of the Word of God' or even `growth in the Lord.' I got caught up focusing on subjects that Jesus Christ is not documented saying anything about – despite the fact that as an unbeliever I had known the Lord's priorities just from perusing His sermons, deeds, and discourses.<sup>5n</sup> I should have known better.

When I saw 1 Timothy 6:4, I never again felt right about my enjoyment of arguments. I had my rationalizations, but I still never felt right about how much fun an argument was or my rationalizations. Over a period of several years, I lost my enjoyment of arguments, and also my interest in arguments that did not amount to Christian living or proper value of Christ and His work. Per Scripture, this should have been the case to begin with. 1 Timothy 6:3-4a translated closely says:

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the prior congregations did believe these things, but detail was scanty because of their emphases on baptism and on disparagements of other Christian groups. I did not pick up those beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> Detail from Scripture on all these matters relevant to salvation is in *Part 4*.

<sup>3</sup> At time of this writing, my church home is not a Baptist congregation.

<sup>4</sup> This even happens when their congregation buildings are within eyesight of each other, or even right next to each other!

<sup>5</sup> **If any new Christians are reading this, please do not let anyone convince you that it is not of maturity to keep your focus on the subjects Jesus Christ taught about.** As a Christian, you should keep your focus on the subjects Jesus Christ is documented teaching about.

"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in disputes" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Here at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."<sup>1</sup> The problem with the disapproved teachings is just that it does not stick to these subjects. Many people wrongly think that the problem with the disapproved teachings was that they were inaccurate. Here is the truth: the problem with the disapproved teachings is that they simply did not stick to the appointed subjects.

It has been my observation that most of the things Christian groups strive over and seek to stay divided over are exactly what 1 Timothy 6:3-4a reproveth. Many people think that their disputed distinctive teachings are what the Lord would want taught. However, these disputed distinctive teachings typically have nothing to do with anything Jesus Christ is documented saying "words" about. Also, these disputed distinctive teachings typically have no relevance to living in ways that please God in overall regular life.

If we want to be Christians, we have to follow Jesus Christ's teachings. Christians are to enact His teachings. 1 Timothy 6:3-4a tells us we need to "adhere to" the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ." To be right Christians, we need to be following the "sound words" spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). It is sad that so many toss aside this dying wish of Christ when others do not agree with their teachings about 'how to serve Christ.'

The truth is: we Christians do not need to 'surmise'/'infer' what the Lord wants in the case of John 17:20-1a. He wants all those who "believe on" Him to "all be one." Whatever we 'surmise' about 'what the Lord wants taught,' John 17:20-1a requires no surmising. In level of certainty, that exceeds any 'surmising' we come up with about 'what the Lord wants taught.'<sup>2n</sup> Therefore, we ought to be following John 17:20-1a.

It is not good that many people claiming to follow Christ actually prefer not to follow His words at John 17:20-1a. Many people insist that they be agreed with about 'what the Lord wants taught,'<sup>3n</sup> and that their teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught' be adopted by everyone who wants to be a Christian. If any Christian does not agree with their teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught,' they have unpleasant feelings toward that Christian, as well as for any others who hold religious tenets that discord with what they want in the Lord's church. They prefer to stay 'unwarmly' separate from any such Christians. As far as they are concerned, what Jesus Christ wished at John 17:20-1a 'can' be honored when everyone else agrees 'enough' with them – but not a moment before. In their desire to be agreed with, they are setting aside Jesus Christ's dying will; whether intentionally so or not, it is still setting Jesus Christ's dying will aside.

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<sup>1</sup> in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

<sup>2</sup> If any such 'surmising' was of vital importance, it is not likely the Lord would not have left us needing to 'surmise it.' More likely, He would have clearly expressed it.

<sup>3</sup> By agreeing with them about 'what the Lord wants taught,' one would be saying that they are right. This gratifies their pride. This is why they are so willing to be such fighting 'warriors': the cause for which they fight gratifies their pride.

There are plenty of 'warriors for the Lord' willing to fight against followers of the Lord based upon what the 'warriors' think the Lord wants taught. Matthew 5:9 documents Jesus Christ stating "Blessed are the peacemakers" (ASV). What is needed in the Lord's cause is more people who will do what He expressly commends.

The reality is that Jesus Christ said at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Many people surmise their own teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught.' Even if such teachings are actually accurate, it would not follow that the Lord wants His express statement here set aside for such teachings.

Jesus Christ said at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Many people surmise their own teachings about 'what the Lord wants us to teach.' They insist that every member of the Lord's church should adopt their teachings on this, and seek 'unwarm' separations from Christians who will not adopt their teachings on 'what the Lord wants taught.' Not only do they set aside what Jesus said at John 17:20-1a, they believe that the Lord is 'on their side' in so doing! Essentially, based upon these teachings that mortals have surmised, these people think that not only can they set aside Jesus Christ's express statement at John 17:20-1a, but also that Jesus Christ is pleased with them doing so! When it is put this succinctly, it seems highly unlikely.

Jesus Christ died for His church. He gave up His sinlessness to bear the wrath of God for all Christians' sins. It is not too much for us to set aside our desires to have our own teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught' promoted in His church. 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). Let us set aside our desires to be agreed with, and make united efforts to enact Christ's teachings.

To Christians who wish to do as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a, beware that resistance exists among church people. You will find that there are church people who are not open to doing as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a for varying reasons. You can expect that congregations led by such persons will not support your effort to do as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a. You may have to make your own effort as an individual Christian. If you are resisted, stand strong.

Do not go on a campaign that disrupts the life of a congregation. If your congregation is controlled by factious entities, attempt to simply conduct yourself peacefully as a Christian among them who follows the Bible's commands on unity and against factiousness. There may be cases where their resistance hinders your service to the Lord. In those cases, the proper course of action is to consider attending another congregation. Whatever choices you must make, be unyielding in your commitment to follow Scripture's teachings on unity.

If you wish to do as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a, many church people who prefer to set aside John 17:20-1a will treat you like you are doing wrong. They may try to convince you that you are doing wrong. They may try to pass onto you the self-excusing rationalizations that they have accepted. They may not always be nice. They may accuse you of 'not caring about the truth.' They may accuse of you of 'approving of error.' Amazingly, they of all people may even have the audacity to accuse you of being 'less than fully' committed to Jesus Christ. Take heart: you are seeking to do what Jesus Christ expressly said He wants. Remember that.

Contrary to what many people think, 'at church' is not the only place to be Christian. Jesus Christ's teachings have relevance to all of life, and church assembly is just a handful of hours out of the 168 hours in a calendar week. Because Jesus Christ's teachings have relevance to all of life, His teachings can and should be enacted in overall life. 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). Let us Christians make united efforts to enact Jesus Christ's teachings in overall life. ■

## *Author's Personal Statement About Lead-Ups to This Study*

### *Salvation and My Own Progressive Divisiveness*

After two years of simultaneous atheism and parental compulsion to attend non-hardline<sup>1n</sup> Church of Christ congregations, I was elsewhere taught about salvation by faith<sup>2n</sup> and making it real by doing good things for the Lord. This was in a "fundamental" Baptist church building privately on Thursday morning, June 17, 1993 at 16 years old. Immediately, I began showing changes that regeneration as Christians causes in "a new creature" (ASV) – 2 Corinthians 5:17. Titus 2:14b says 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).

Unfortunately, this congregation withheld baptism from me. The main reason was their error that baptism is not in any way tied to salvation. They viewed baptism highly, so they wanted to wait and see if I showed a changed life, lest they "baptize" a non-Christian. While I showed clear signs of being a new Christian, I awaited when they would allow me to do the 'biggie' that Scripture commands of new Christians: baptism. On November 14, 1993 I was baptized to obey Scripture. It did not affect how zealous I was to please the Lord because I already had been since June 17, 1993, but I felt like I had done all the things new Christians are to do.

From June 1993 to spring 1999, I earnestly engaged in study of and about Scripture. I studied privately, in congregation settings, and in informal Bible study groups. I studied reference works about the Bible, and saw to use Bible translations in foreign languages I can read. I also spent two weeks on the mission field in Bogotá, Colombia,

advised as unsafe by the U.S. government, and then in the heavily Spiritist Amazon region of Brazil.

Ever since I accepted the Gospel, I could not understand why there was so much resistance among churches in various denominations to cooperate in service to the Lord. Unfortunately, I was taught the unbiblical notion that one should only go to church with whom s/he thought had pristine understanding from the Bible about strictly-academic religious tenets and church worship procedures. I suspected something not right on this, but the 'service to the Lord' I enjoyed most was harsh refutations over these. I felt discomfort about 1 Timothy 6:3-4, but did not yet change. I restricted regular attendance to churches in the 'right' denominations while being open to visits outside of those, oblivious to how oppositional this was to my belief in cooperation.

One reason I left the Baptist church I got saved at was what was agreed on by that "fundamental" Baptist congregation and my pre-conversion two Churches of Christ: 'go with the Bible only, give no authority to the opinions of any person, study it for yourself,<sup>3n</sup> and try to replicate the New Testament church using Scripture as sole authority.' At the Baptist church, "Individual Soul Liberty" from Romans 14 was emphasized. In this, the Christian is free to make responsible decisions accountable to God in areas where Scripture is not explicit. In fall 1998, the preacher began teaching a list of things that Scripture was silent about but which could not possibly be not sin.

<sup>3</sup> Without acknowledging it, both types often add '...but be sure you arrive at our party line.' Those leaders insist on freedom to interpret Scripture for themselves, but do not grant it fully to others, contrary to Luke 6:31.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to CONDUCT, not belief.

<sup>2</sup> Baptism was so emphasized by the prior congregations that I missed this.

He also became increasingly influenced by the fact that Baptist churches are a continuation of the Anabaptists whose origins predated the 1500's Protestant Reformation. He began to believe that Baptist churches are themselves New Testament churches. "Baptist tradition" began to appear increasingly in his sermons for the 'New Testament church' understanding of passages. Between advocating "Individual Sole Liberty" while preaching and teaching

against it in effect, and the increasing encroachment of "Baptist tradition" on how Scripture was preached, another building was becoming more appealing. The Baptist preacher later returned to preaching only from Scripture.

In fall 1998<sup>1n</sup> I was about to become a victim of my own hierarching of 'best' and 'worst' church affiliations based upon denominational distinctives.

<sup>1</sup>Also, in 1997-8 I learned firsthand that Bible skeptics could be good Christians.

### Enlightening Experience

A hard-line<sup>1n</sup> "Church of Christ" building spoke best of biblical authority — I will explain the quotation marks later. Also, the group of people who met in it, at first look, did not alter the Bible conversion experience. For the first time, I was shown passages which linked baptism to salvation. They presented them in a way to teach that salvation was by completed baptism. These were apparent contradictions with Ephesians 2:8-10, where nothing we do after "faith" causes our salvation "not of works" (KJV). This was deeply troubling to me; if God's Word was self-contradictory on how to be saved, how could we be sure there would even be salvation? I began my own extensive study to try to harmonize the passages on salvation by faith with passages linking baptism to salvation. With the help of foreign language translations with finer verb tenses and nuances than English has available, I learned that there is no contradiction. The Baptist church I got saved at saw the same in Scripture about confession that I now also saw in Scripture about baptism. I learned that salvation is indeed by faith itself, but that baptism is a required follow-up of any faith as Scripture means "faith" — while salvation is by such faith before baptism, obedience to the command to get baptized is not optional in regards to salvation.

Between November 1998 and August 1999, this was where I usually went during church time. I did visit an Assembly of God with a friend and a few other churches, but usually I went to the hard-line "Church of Christ" building. I did not expect the gap between belief about the Bible claimed in words versus how they followed its basic principles. They spoke mean-spirited tirades against "the denominations" that often involved statements that were not true,<sup>2n</sup> nor did it seem to matter. I saw a near-celebratory attitude that "the denominations" faced a 'bad eternity,' and meetings often involved much self-congratulation about their own 'correctness.' I saw tracts from other hard-line "Church of Christ" buildings that involved slanderous lies, and despite naïve efforts to point out some of the most glaring inaccuracies,<sup>3n</sup> the tracts were kept.

<sup>2</sup>Example: that 'denominational' people "believe whatever they want." Usually hard-liners before outsiders say about 'denominational people' things like 'not bad people, just sincerely in error.' Among themselves, they commonly say that 'denominational' people are willing sinners, which reviles character.

<sup>3</sup>Example: Grover Stevens wrote in a pamphlet "Why I Left the Baptist Church" the following:

"a denominational preacher will preach for an hour and 'wind up' by saying that it doesn't matter whether you believe what he has been preaching or not."

Of course, many of us have seen a "denominational preacher" plea to a congregation to make good decisions for the Lord, so we know better.

<sup>1</sup> "Hard-line" means they view nearly ANY non-violent means -- right or wrong -- of promoting their group interests as okay. They do not acknowledge this.



Auxiliary Material: Personal Statement

I saw religiously-motivated malicious acts done unabashedly that would be disapproved of in secular society whether done for religion or not.<sup>1n</sup> The final straw was a tangent in a sermon: the tangent taught that grudges were okay as long as they were acted on only in certain ways.<sup>2n</sup> The leaders spoke against churches having ice cream socials because they are "not authorized" – but grudges could be okay. Hebrews 6:1 says "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith toward God" (NKJV|NASB|ICB|NASB). I finally

<sup>1</sup> One account is as follows. I was asked to "study" with the preacher at his home. I repeatedly declined, but he nagged me until I consented. I went over some material he gave me, and saw quickly that the questions were of the type 'Do you agree with us on this, or can it be claimed that you reject Scripture?' Very naïvely, I showed up anyway, alone with him at his home.

When I showed the preacher how various translations in Portuguese of his favorite passages did not support the tracts, he accused of not believing I have to obey the Bible, and asked why I even came since I felt I knew the Scriptures. He disregarded that he nagged me into this "study."

He also said I do not belong at "a place that teaches the truth," but "need to go some place where they read Portuguese or whatever." This would suggest that native Portuguese-readers would not "teach the truth." We were alone; it is doubtful he would have done this with others present – especially anyone outside his group.

Foolishly, I stayed with this group because I liked what they said about Scripture. It would take more months to see that this was only words.

<sup>2</sup> This happened when an 'identifier' who adopted all party lines started trouble in regular life with a regular attender who had not adopted all party lines. The regular attender felt obligated to try to reconcile, and shared passages against grudges including Romans 12:18, but the identifier refused to accept what those passages meant. The tangent described was in the very next 'sermon.'

accepted the truth of what I had long seen: despite lip-service toward Scripture, these people did not get the basics of it, nor did they really care about those basics, so they were not qualified to teach anyone anything about Scripture. I had been a fool; it had been WELL PAST time to leave.

They did alter the conversion experience: for baptism to be held valid, it had to be 'with intention for remission of sins.' In Scripture, one must only believe that Jesus Christ is Lord in the biblical sense. Esteemed group members lived 'Where Scripture is silent, we forbid'; while obsessing over and being nasty about what is not written, they commonly disregarded the basics of what is written. There are Christians among religious groups that meet in hard-line "Church of Christ" buildings, but from later and more widespread observation and exposure, I realized later that hard-line "Churches of Christ" are not church congregations. Why:

- how little they care about being truthful in religious polemics and other group interests
- how they treat those they judge to be 'decided non-Christians,' are indifferent about or enjoy inflicting such treatment, and encourage others in such treatment

do not match the faith Christ described at Matthew 7:20 "by their fruits ye shall know them" (ASV). Christians are not "going to church" when meeting with them; Matthew 18:20 "two or three are gathered in my name" (ESV) does not apply because those groups do not meet for what Jesus' Name<sup>3n</sup> is about, and Christians' walks could get tainted or damaged by them. Because of this group and like groups whose most active and esteemed persons commonly show less Christian virtue, are less honest, less kind, and more nasty because they meet at their building than they would be if they had no religion at all, I saw how VITAL it is to get the basics as Christians before we fixate on congregational distinctives.

<sup>3</sup> In ancient times, "name" summed up the whole person,\* and was not merely physical identification.

\*in Barker, NASB Study Bible, page 1519.

*Down to the Basics*

In fall 1998, as my Baptist congregation's leadership temporarily drifted off sole authority of Scripture, things began to go seriously wrong in my life outside of religion — or so it looked at the time. These events were not minor: they involved a hope for my life shattered, an important life plan seriously complicated and delayed, unexpected belligerence by a then long-time and cherished friend which 'coincidentally' would have been of great benefit to that person,<sup>1n</sup> and humiliations from these situations and others. My 1999 college graduation was not a joyous occasion. After I departed the hard-line "Church of Christ" building, things continued to decline. After I left the hard-line "Church of Christ" building, I drifted churches visiting short-term. Things got better, then worse. I spent time at a

<sup>1</sup> It may have been a coincidence, but odd bad events followed for me, and s/he got something related that s/he wanted.

*Rebuilt as a Non-Divisive Christian*

When that situation for me reached its low point in January 2001, I had met some Christian friends. To see them, I joined them at a college ministry hosted at their university but shared by my new college. It got me back wanting to do more for the Lord. I also served in a Catholic school for six weeks. By spring 2002 I wanted regular church attendance; in fall 2002 I began attending the Assembly of God I visited in spring 1999. Assemblies of God are Pentecostal, and while I agreed little with Pentecostal distinctives, I was drawn to their enthusiasm in celebrating the Lord and serving accordingly, plus I was needed for one of their ministries.

At this Assembly of God, I was asked to be in a drama ministry, which I did not really want at first but which they needed me in. That drama ministry sometimes involved help from a nearby non-denominational church, including its preacher. This Assembly of God also invited preachers from other denominations to preach, and held a joint service with an Apostolic Pentecostal

Methodist church with a friend, then time at the Baptist church I got saved at, but eventually quit attending any at all. These 'catastrophes' cooled my desire to serve the Lord, in part because I believed He did not love me. I confess I should have trusted the Lord better in these situations.

During time of poor trust in the Lord and coolness on service to Him, my service was basic obedience in regular life and good deeds. I did not squabble any longer about what should happen when churches were assembled; I had my opinions from Scripture, but I did not care enough anymore to argue for them. I was only interested in the basics: obeying in regular life. Being down to "the minimum" was a very important experience for me because from it I relearned what is most important in the Christian's life. Now it was time to start growing a different direction.

congregation to celebrate a mutually helpful property transaction. I also helped a friend in a youth ministry at a Methodist church. My time in the Assemblies of God also taught me that Christian worship and service can be fun without being irreverent.

From late summer 2003 to spring 2004, I could usually attend services at my home congregation only on Sunday mornings, and had to be hours away during the rest of the week. In visiting Pentecostal churches elsewhere during the week, as well as observing events in my own congregation, I began to get a sinking realization that Pentecostalism often involved an unhealthy interest in 'good show.' While most certainly NOT universal to Pentecostalism as a whole, this widespread desire for extravagance often wastes finances and needlessly complicates people's tasks in ministry. I was never inconvenienced personally, but after I had witnessed enough excesses, I grew tired of it, and came to want a home congregation where things were simpler.

I found a good non-hardline Church of Christ congregation in July 2004. In spring 1999 I had lost my desire to discuss Scripture's teachings, but during their Bible study times this changed. Unlike 1999 and before, I was now most interested in Scripture's teachings about regular life and service away from assembly.\* In September 2004, I began to regularly work with children in school settings. Since spring 1995, I had avoided being around children whenever

\* "Churches of Christ" and Churches of Christ

This is distinct from the United Church of Christ. Many classify buildings named "Church of Christ" into over 20 categories, but as far as what is important, I believe there are only two types:

- 1) hard-line/radical, and
- 2) non-hardline/non-radical.

Theological liberalism is rejected in both kinds, but the former often slanders the latter as "liberal."

Hard-line "Churches of Christ" typically focus on what Scripture says about assembled worship and distinctly religious beliefs taught at assembly. Compared to most Christians, they have very little regard for Scripture's teachings about life away from assembled worship. Unlike Christians, most of their leaders and influencers disregard these teachings when this may advance group interests. Hard-liners deny doing this, but just as theological liberals disregard parts of Scripture, they do too. The 'hard line' is that their party lines and propagators should be advanced even by means that clearly violate Scripture's teachings on conduct.

Non-hardline Churches of Christ have similar distinctive beliefs held just as strongly. However, they know that Scripture's teaching on conduct in and out of church assembly is always binding and can never be disregarded. Hard-liners commonly disdain non-hardline congregations; non-hardliners often perceive a kinship due to common name and similarity of group distinctives. This causes non-hardliners' influencers to often be tainted by hard-liner ways. In reality, non-hardliners have far more in common with Christians in other denominations than with hard-liners, but do not always notice. This is prevented by focus on group tenets instead of on Scripture's priorities for our lives. Great benefit would result if more of the non-radicals would realize their real kinships.

It is pointless to try to replicate "the church of the New Testament" if the person does not follow the Christ of the New Testament. "Church of Christ" radicals do not follow Jesus Christ; Church of Christ Christians and other Christians do.

possible. Therefore, starting September 2004, when working with them and learning to understand them and enjoy them and adore them, I learned very much. One such lesson is in *Part 7/Conclusion 3*.

I am an educator with experience in being employed by multiple educational institutions simultaneously,<sup>1n</sup> and in such a situation, one simply adjusts to the policies of where s/he is located at the time; church congregations can often be handled similarly. In spring 2005 I asked to serve a role at Vacation Bible School at a prominent Baptist congregation near the school I worked; I wanted to be a Christian influence on the children of that school. Unexpectedly, I was asked to be ex-third grade teacher at this VBS, and this was the age group I had worked most with the prior year. Anytime and anywhere I teach, I subject what I say and/or how I say it to congregation leadership, keeping to Hebrews 13:17. A teacher does not always have to relay all s/he believes; Proverbs 18:2 says "The fool" desires "only to air his thoughts" (JPS 1985), and all-knowing Jesus did not say everything He could have. Sometimes merely relaying without commentary that the particular congregation teaches/does such-and-such is most appropriate. During that week, the joy of teaching children about following the Lord amidst their enjoyment addicted me.

This Baptist congregation's Vacation Bible School curriculum was very basic in July 2005: we studied how salvation by faith in what Jesus Christ did operates, and we also studied obedience to that faith, for which the issued curriculum used baptism. During that week, a child asked about what congregations do regarding baptism. The class had children from multiple denominations. I recalled my own childhood and responded as

<sup>1</sup> One scenario of several: a college and one or more elementary schools.

so: 'Some churches...; other churches...' because to me when I was a child and to most children, churches are churches, which all tell us to do the same good things in our regular lives -- and I was entirely unwilling to dis-educate them otherwise. This would only have confused them and caused unneeded distraction. Children need to learn the basics of how to serve and obey the Lord to grow up into Christians, and we should let nothing distract this objective.

*Service before controversy.*

—Gist of 1 Timothy 6:3-4 + Titus 3:8-9.

We adult Christians should let nothing distract or impede our overall service

to the Lord either. When appropriate, it is good to discuss differences and positively contribute edifying relevant information in matters of disagreement. I most certainly do not agree with or approve of all that happens in the meetings of our various 'fellowships' and denominations and genuinely/entirely unaffiliated congregations. Some of these things do not match my preferences, and some of these things I strongly disapprove of. Nonetheless, careful study of Scripture shows that Christians are called away from indulging in factional 'party spirit' against each other in the Lord's service, and our 'yes, but' rationalizations do not change this.

*Between Then and This Study.*

The 'catastrophes' that I thought were 'catastrophes' in 1998-2000 were hard circumstances -- not catastrophes. First, the plan that was complicated and delayed by events of 1998-9 was improved when I got a job doing what I wanted to do and had already done -- but in a better venue; the job offer came in a surprise phone call during Vacation Bible School 2005.

Even better news followed. A few weeks after accepting the Gospel in summer 1993, symptoms of a rare and serious illness began to appear in my body; it is not communicable, but is considered terminal. What it was is not for public knowledge. It worsened until Vacation Bible School 2005 and a few weeks after, when I had bouts of intense joy that were physically tiring. Due to those weeks, I personally suspect that Christians will need the new bodies of 1 Corinthians 15:42-54 in part to be able to bear the joys of Heaven. Proverbs 17:22a says "A cheerful heart is a good medicine" (ASV). During those several weeks, the illness began to clear up. In January 2006 the specialist who treated it for years said it is gone. There is no wholly medical explanation for this.

Without most of those 'catastrophes,' I would not have taught VBS, a likely influence on the illness's disappearance -- orchestrated by the God we Christians serve -- matching Romans 8:28a "And we know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him" (ASV|ICB).

Since conversion, I have been a Christian only. I have sought to avoid any 'blinding' allegiant loyalty to

any group, or any group-motivated 'on principle' hostility to another. Wherever I have 'gone to church,' my sole highest loyalty has been to Jesus Christ Himself and His service. For me, to be 'Christian only' does NOT mean 'only Christians' nor 'more Christian.'

My Church of Christ and 'fundamental' Baptist background, plus mathematics coursework in college, taught me to seek and examine underlying assumptions. These influence how we approach Scripture. Also, as I studied Scripture and learned more, I saw ever the more ways to reasonably misunderstand it. It became clearer that we should be charitable about Bible inferences.

In the past few years, it has been exciting for me to encounter more and more Christians who wish to serve Christ mainly by their own lives rather than by congregation. I have encountered them all over the Christian 'churchscape.' Since I started this study, I have encountered others who have independently arrived at similar views to ones in this study. To more and more of us, serving Christ means to serve Him by our own lives and deeds, rather than by mainly an allegiance to 'fellowship'/'brotherhood'/denomination or congregation party lines. These Christians desire to serve the Lord so much that disagreement is not enough to undermine seeking the best for Christ. It is great to see more and more of God's people seek to join and involve as many of God's people as possible in seeking the best for the Lord. More and more Christians are realizing that the Lord's work must be held foremost. It is my hope that the tradition of the carnal divisive agreement-fixated Christian is fading away.

*This Study and the Present*

After months of aspiring this study, I finally began in July 2006 and finished a first draft two months later. This study has affected my doings. One effect: I try more to visit Christian groups with worship styles I disagree with during uncommon service times. Another effect: sermons preached at a non-hardline Church of Christ about Christian unity, as well as my experiences, my own observations of Scripture and of the church, plus this study led me to a Disciples of Christ congregation for church home.

I pondered that decision for eight months. I knew they did prompt baptism of converts, yet opposed the carnal sin of factiousness, but a reputation of devaluing Scripture concerned me. Still, over time, I felt guilty about having groups that encouraged or pressed factiousness for my church home. In March 2007 I realized that congregations' opposition to sin should come first. I also saw that what people think about Jesus Christ, not about Scripture, must come first. It turned out that biblical conservatives have a big presence in the Disciples of Christ - and they with the rest of the denomination avoid how so many biblical conservatives engage in:

- ◆ indulgence in carnal factious urges of the flesh with their own acts of dividing in violation of Galatians 5:19-21 and Romans 16:17;
- ◆ overvalue of denomination or 'fellowship' or 'brotherhood' distinctives which are
  1. disagreed-on by honest, well-studied, Scripture-focused Christians,
  2. therefore reasonably open to question from Scripture,
  3. therefore not unambiguous from Scripture,
  4. and furthermore, also irrelevant to good deeds and godly lifestyle,<sup>1n</sup>in violation of 1 Timothy 6:3-4 + Titus 3:8-9;
- ◆ and/or knowing truths of biblical unity but being unwilling to act meaningfully on them, in violation of James 4:17

with resultant detriment to service for Christ.

<sup>1</sup> When I was an atheist, I knew from perusals of Christ's teachings that His teaching focused on doing what is good. Years later, it is a marvel to me that so many of His followers and similar non-followers have gotten caught up focusing on other things that He did not even touch on. I should have known better when I got caught up in it too.

The Lord Jesus repeatedly called us to focus on Him foremost. One of His last earthly sayings was when one disciple became unduly attentive about another; Jesus said to him "what is that| to you? You follow Me" (ASV|NBV) at John 21:22b.

Continuing this, at times it bothers me greatly to know that to many Christians, our Savior Jesus Christ is not foremost; to them, being disagreed-with and/or others' unshared devotion to their cherished group tenets makes the fact that we are all Christ's servants effectively unimportant. Many of these Christians would rather shun, protest, or even outright oppose disagreed-with fellow-servants of Christ than serve the Lord alongside them. To Christians who love the Lord, this should be seen as a grievous wrong.

We can be sure that the Lord views this grievous wrong with utter disfavor. There is a deep and immense need of repentance in the church on this matter.

Jesus Christ said "Blessed are the peacemakers" (ASV) at Matthew 5:9. We all need to heed this in His church.

Since March 2007, my church home has been in the Disciples of Christ. In preparation for relocation after marriage, my beloved and I were blessed to find and attach to an old-style Christian Church within the Disciples of Christ in 2009. Since March 2007, I have also served in ministries within other denominations, including Baptists and Methodists. I also frequent the evening ministrations of a different non-hardline Church of Christ congregation. In July 2004-September 2006, my church home was among the non-hardline Churches of Christ. During that time, with nothing other than approval expressed, I served the Lord across denomination lines, and was richly blessed. I urge others to do the same, always keeping in mind what being a Christian means, plus the Hebrews 10:24-5 purpose for Christians even meeting as church congregations, and rightly prioritizing accordingly. -- Darron L. Steele

*1 Thessalonians 5:16 "Rejoice-joy-joy sempre" (ARA/ARC/AEC/NRA)  
= "You-must-rejoice-you always" ■*

## *Bibliography and More: Printed Volumes, Bible Translations, and Miscellaneous Acknowledgements*

Disclaimer: Inclusion of these sources in the "Bibliography and More" is an acknowledgment of where I got information, ideas, and viewpoints regardless of agreement or not. **Inclusion of these sources should not be construed as an endorsement of the entirety of these works.**

Notice: At times, bibliography entries were copied from my older writings. While every reasonable effort has been made to adapt those entries to be consistent with the bibliographic style used for this document, traces of my earlier styles may still exist.

Note: This study was finished in September 2006, but was not finalized, and has been expanding since that date; this bibliography has expanded with it. Any use of formal materials listed in this bibliography is documented in footnotes. Some of these materials contain ideas that appear in this study which I arrived at independently before seeing them in these materials. Parallels between ideas in this paper and ideas in formal materials which are not documented in a footnote are such instances.

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*Bible Translations and Versions Quoted and Cited by Abbreviation*

\*\* The abbreviation "mg" means "margin note." \*\*

\*\*\*I tried to follow the copyright notices specified in various volumes. This has resulted in a number of oddities.\*\*\*

*English Direct Translations Quoted and Cited by Abbreviation*

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*Miscellaneous Acknowledgements*

- ▼ Valuable insights, promptings for clarification, and promptings of thought were provided by discussions of the members of the following Internet discussion boards:

Church of Christ Conversations: <<http://makephpbb.com/phpbb/index.php?mforum=members>>. This is one of two boards affiliated with <<http://www.ex-churchofchrist.com/>> which was also a source of information. This particular board is open to anyone in or out of the Churches of Christ.

The so-called “Bible Study Forum” at <<http://www.preachersfiles.com/forum/>>. One had to be in the radical ‘hard-line’ portion of the Churches of Christ to get and retain regular standing at this site – often “Churches of Christ” in name only, because how a disproportionate amount of them, including their leaders, lied about and treated other people does not seem to show biblical faith explained in *Part 4*. Also, posters had to have or be seen as coming to certain conclusions or

---they were attacked with malicious accusations and slandered as believing things they do not, and/or denying things that they believe, all of which were insisted upon even after correction;

---their capabilities to post were disabled typically without notice to anyone at all, with no known infraction, without warning despite claim by site administrators of following a Titus 3:10-11 policy, and sometimes with further negative untrue comments made about the person afterward.

Therefore, it was not a true “Bible Study Forum” and not fitting for those seeking a real Bible study. This particular board has since been closed and replaced with another which is similar.

A similar site at <<http://www.sitefortheLord.com>>, where similar tactics are used as at the other radical “Church of Christ” site noted here, but with less open malice than that other ‘hard-line’ site.

A Church of Christ “Resource” board at <<http://www.soundwordsonline.com/phpBB/index.php>>. This has since been replaced by a new board at <<http://www.forum.faithofreason.com/>>.

The “Christian FELLOWSHIP Forums” and “Other Christian Denominations” areas of BaptistBoard: <<http://www.baptistboard.com>>. These parts of that board are open to non-Baptist Christians.

A general Christian ministry 5 Loaves & 2 Fishes; discussion board <<http://5loaves2fishes.net/forum/>>.

- ▼ A change in underlying Greek text in the history of the editions of the KJV at John 16:25 was pointed out at <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/kjv.html>>, July 2003, which prompted my investigation. This is located in *Part I/ Deciding the Text of Scripture – Part II of III: The New Testament Problem* and the use is footnoted.
- ▼ Information on the 1543 Francisco de Enzinas New Testament translation into Spanish was provided by Bill Kincaid at a website <<http://www.west.ga.net/~ForHim/Word.html>>, October 1999.

- ▼ Jay Guin provided an idea about a notion to "merge churches" between two denominations: "There is only one church, and the Baptists and we are already in it. We might as well get used to it." I built on this.
  - 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>> at last paragraph. My use is at *Part 7/ Our Denominations* and Internet addresses are footnoted there.
- ▼ I feel like it would not be right if I would not acknowledge that some of my knowledge about common beliefs/practices of some Christian groups comes from Internet expressions by members/adherents, printed literature by members/adherents, spoken discourses by members/adherents, and conversations with members/adherents. Just as it would be impossible to recall and list all those to whom I owe gratitude for Scriptural insights over the years, it is impossible to remember all those described sources over the years to list them here, but there are contents of this study that would be absent if not for them; the efforts of those people gave me invaluable first-hand sources for information and understanding.
- ▼ I picked up the proposition of unity of purpose among Christians in sermons preached by Shawn McMullen at the Church of Christ at Milan in Milan, Indiana in spring and summer 2006. This document is a result of:
  - 1) my own thoughts on interdenominational Christian cooperation since accepting the Gospel at Washington Baptist Church between Versailles and Dillsboro in Indiana in 1993,
  - 2) this idea expressed by S. McMullen which gave me clarity,
  - 3) my studies and reflections building upon this idea, extending it to church congregations, and combining these with my older thoughts.Shawn McMullen would likely NOT agree with much of the content of this document and with many of the conclusions derived from this idea, but I do not feel that it would have been right for me to not specify that I did not come up with this idea and to not specify from whom I got it.
- ▼ My thanks to the 2005 and 2006 Vacation Bible School leadership of Switzerland Baptist Church in Vevay, Indiana for allowing me the experience of teaching their children during summers 2005 and 2006, especially since I was not and am not a Baptist Christian.
- ▼ As a new Christian, years before I learned the Bible meaning of the Bible term "church," my mother, Judith Steele, told me that the quality of a church is its people. This helped me pick up on the significance of the Bible meaning of the Bible term "church" years later.
- ▼ My thanks to First Christian Church, Madison, Indiana for my first opportunity to be part of a congregation where biblical Christian unity is fully a "polar star," and for an opportunity to be active in its ministry during my time there. My thanks also to First Baptist Church for being such generous, helpful, and hospitable neighbors and partners. These congregations provided a case demonstration of biblical church unity.
- ▼ My thanks to Versailles Church of Christ in Indiana for not only allowing me to 'moonlight' with them during my time at mornings-only First Christian Church in Madison, but also involving me – like a 'second church home.' This has provided a case demonstration of principles from biblical Christian unity.
- ▼ My thanks to Milroy Christian Church in Indiana for confirming that congregations can be firm on Bible belief without pervasive factiousness and be unity-oriented. Thanks also to Milroy United Methodist Church for being partners in ministry and fellowship, helping make a case demonstration of biblical church unity.
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- ▼ My thanks to Christian education laborers of 1990-3 Versailles Church of Christ and Cross Plains Church of Christ in Indiana, and 1993-8 Washington Baptist Church east of Versailles and south of Milan, for teaching the merits of working closely with the text of Scripture. That approach gave the method of this document.
- ▼ My thanks to friends and loved ones/family who indulge me and/or have indulged me in conversations/ventings over the topics related to the theme of this study, allowing me to 'think out loud.'

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Note: this excludes header and footer, and it is common for a passage to be considered multiple times in this paper.

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