

The Way of Christ Without Denominationalism

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The Harm of Denominationalism

Several years ago I debated a professor in one of our state universities who was the faculty sponsor of a group called The League for the Promotion of Militant Atheism. This group challenged religious groups to debate the evidences for the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible. A local group of Christians selected me to respond to the challenge. In preparation for the debate I read several interviews with this professor. One contained an argument against the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible that is unanswerable. As a matter of fact, it is the strongest argument atheists and skeptics can use. It has produced more atheists than all the militant atheists put together!

The Atheist's Unanswerable Argument Against the Way of Christ

This professor based his argument upon religious division. He said:

Common sense tells us that atheism is a much more rational stand in the face of the conflicting claims of the world's religions than fleeing to the Bible.

The fact that there are so many religions shows, at best, that human beings have a weakness for irrational beliefs.

The Atheist Agrees with Jesus

This argument is unanswerable because it agrees exactly with what Jesus said about the harm of religious division! This militant atheist preached exactly like Christ on this subject. As a matter of fact, he preached more like Christ on this subject than many preachers do.

In Jn. 17.20-21, on the night before he died, Jesus prayed for all the believers in him who would come after him to believe the same thing. Thus, if we believe in Christ, this is Christ's prayer for us. Jesus began by praying in his own behalf, then in behalf of the apostles. Then he said:

Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; *that they may all be one*; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me.

Paul, in I Cor. 1.10-11, taught much the same thing when he told the Corinthian Christians:

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 perfected together in the *same mind and in the same judgment*.

Likewise, Paul prayed in Rom. 15.5-6:

...that with *one accord* ye may with *one mouth* glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then in Gal. 5.20, Paul said concerning religious division:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, *factions, divisions*,...of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they that practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

With these passages fresh in our minds, we must ask ourselves some questions, “Do all believers in denominations speak the same thing? Are there any divisions that are works of the flesh? Do all denominational believers speak with one mouth?”

The answer to all these questions is a dismal, “No!” Over 760 separate religious denominations exist in the United States alone, all claiming allegiance to Christ. But they all teach different things that contradict the others. Yet they all claim to teach their distinctive doctrines right out of the Bible.

This is why Jesus prayed that division among his followers would not occur, that the world might believe that he was the Christ. If Christ approved of religious division, the atheist’s argument against the way of Christ would be unanswerable.

Greatest Enemy of True Religion Is Religion Itself

We don’t have to look far to find examples of how modern denominations ignore Jesus’ prayer for unity.

Newsweek Magazine

What do we imagine any intelligent person saw in this notice in *Newsweek Magazine* several years ago?

The Good Shepherd Baptist Church in Denver, Colo., has refused to meet the payments on a small stucco building it contracted to buy from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1965—precisely on the ground that the property already belongs to God. The Baptists say “the Holy Spirit revealed to them that once you buy a church property, it belongs to the Lord and nobody can sell it.” The Lutherans say, “But the Holy Spirit did not

speak to us in this way. The Baptists got it from a special revelation and there is no way to deal with that.” (“*Divine Property?*” *Newsweek* [July 5, 1971], p. 51.)

What did the several million people who read this in *Newsweek* think of the concept that the Holy Spirit taught these two denominations two different and contradictory doctrines? What do we think?

Martin Luther

What happens when people realize that the great reformation leader Martin Luther wrote:

I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St. Paul, in I Cor. iii, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcase that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have. (Hugh Thomson Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943], p. 135, cited by Lewis W. Spitz, Ph.D., *Our Church and Others* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969], pp. 23-24.)

Yet people who call themselves Lutherans blatantly disagree with Luther himself, who on this point agreed with Christ.

John Wesley

Another great reformation leader, John Wesley, among whose followers are the Methodists, Wesleyans, etc. said:

Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist—SGD] might never be men-

tioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion. (John Wesley, *Universal Knowledge, A Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Arts, Science, History, Biography, Law, Literature, Religions, Nations, Races, Customs, and Institutions, Vol. 9*, Edward A. Pace, Editor [New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1927], p. 540.)

In violation of Wesley's plea, his followers still call themselves Methodists, Nazarenes, and Wesleyans.

Charles Spurgeon

What transpires when people learn that Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest Baptist preachers who ever lived, said:

I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever. (*Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol. I*, n.d., p. 168.)

Instead of Spurgeon's desire coming true, we have at least twenty-six different Baptist denominations in this nation alone. Likewise, Calvinists today disagree with Calvin, etc.

Preachers Teach Contradictory Doctrines

Many people seem to have no problem with all the contradictory doctrines in the religious realm, and yet if a single preacher taught all those contradictory doctrines himself, all would realize he had serious mental problems. Imagine what happens when an intelligent person sees so-called Christians claiming that the Bible can be understood hundreds of different ways, and the amazing thing about it, each way is right if religious division is right!

In truth, denominationalism produces more atheism than all the atheists, militant atheists, hypocrites, and false teachers put together. Jesus knew it, Paul knew it, most of the founders of these denominations knew it, and pleaded that it wouldn't happen.

Fruits of Denominationalism

With respect to religious division, compare the teaching of Jesus Christ with the statements of many prominent atheists:

Jesus

...that they may all be one...that the world may believe. (Jn. 17.20-21)

Benedict Spinoza

This prominent Dutch Philosopher blamed theological creeds with all their contradictions as his rationale for becoming an atheist.

Voltaire

This famous French philosopher blamed the contradictions and abuses of Roman Catholicism for his atheism.

David Hume

This foremost Scottish philosopher blamed the creeds of Calvin and Presbyterianism for his unbelief.

Diderot

The eminent French encyclopedist blamed the creeds of orthodoxy for his atheism.

Robert Owen

Robert Owen was the greatest European atheist of the 19th century. He was a genius and a philanthropist, and concerning his background before debating Alexander Campbell on the evidences for the existence of God, historian Bill J. Humble said:

At the time when Robert Owen came to debate Campbell in 1829, he was 58 years of age and already a world figure of renown, appealing to the popular imagination by his schemes for the betterment of humanity, and arousing the ire of united clergy by his denunciations of all religions. This international figure was born in New Montgomer-

yshire, North Wales, on May 14, 1771. At an early age the boy was enrolled in a day school where he evidenced a precocious mental development; for at seven he had mastered all the information which his instructor could impart and was himself teaching. The intellectual growth of the young man was so rapid that before attaining his tenth birthday, he had investigated a number of theological works and examined their contents so critically as to lead himself to doubt the fundamental nature of all religion. (Bill J. Humble, *Alexander Campbell and Controversy* [Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1952], p. 81.)

The Bible didn't produce this distinguished atheist. The contradictions in denominational creeds did!

Charles Darwin

Many do not realize that the renowned agnostic Charles Darwin at one time studied at a seminary to become a clergyman in the Church of England. How did Charles Darwin, a believer in Christ and a creationist, become an agnostic whose name is inevitably connected with the hypothesis of evolution? What swayed the man who has swayed so many? Why did Darwin, who prepared for the work of a clergyman, become the chief apostle of evolution?

His son, also his biographer, wrote:

We had an earnest conversation about going into Holy Orders; and I remember his asking me, with reference to the question put by the Bishop in the ordination service, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit, etc." whether I could answer in the affirmative, and on my saying I could not, he said, "Neither can I, and therefore I cannot take Orders." (Francis Darwin, *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Vol. I* [New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898], p. 147.)

Darwin didn't reject Christ, or the Bible. He rejected a doctrine that was not even in the Bible, something in the creed book of the

Church of England! Darwin's works influenced the minds of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler, and gave them the "ethical basis" for many of their horrible actions. Who would dare say religious division isn't really so bad?

Robert Ingersoll

The greatest American atheist of the last third of the nineteenth century claimed that theological creeds led to his religious downfall.

Charles Smith

Charles Smith, the first president of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, explained how he became an atheist:

Let me tell you something of how I came to be an Atheist. I used to live in Maud, Oklahoma—was there before the town was built; and have lived in Shawnee. I was in this town some twenty years ago, working for the Farmer's Union. I joined the First Methodist church. A few years later, I went to a Methodist school, Epworth University, in Oklahoma City...The next session I went to the State University at Norman. I tried to continue to believe the Christian religion, but began to investigate its doctrines. One day when watching a football game with my pastor, I asked him if he believed the virgin birth story, and the Adam and Eve story. He said, "Why, of course not." I demanded: "Why do you not tell your congregation that?" He replied: "That would do a great deal of harm, and no good." (Charles Smith, *Oliphant-Smith Debate* [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1952], pp. 23-24.)

In every case, these renowned atheists and skeptics became unbelievers, not because of the Bible and the teaching of Christ or his apostles, but because they rightly couldn't conceive that such religious confusion came from God. People's allegiance to human creeds produced their unbelief.

This is why Jesus prayed that his followers would not be divided. This is the reason we ought to avoid man-made religion: names, doctrines, institutions, organizations, and practices that come from man, not God. This is why Jesus said, in Mt. 15.6-9:

...And ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition...This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.

Creeds Produce Denominationalism

Many times people think denominationalism is produced by an inability of mankind to agree on how the Bible ought to be interpreted. Rather, it is produced by allegiance to something other than God and Christ: allegiance to human creeds. *Webster's New World Dictionary*, says concerning the term "creed":

(...Latin, *credo*, lit., I believe...) 1. a brief statement of religious belief; confession of faith; 2. a specific statement of this kind accepted as authoritative by a church; 3. a statement of belief, principles, or opinions on any subject. (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition [New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970].)

It is important to realize the distinction between a personal creed and an organizational one. I have the right to state what I believe, and other men may state their beliefs as well. However, denominational creeds are not statements of personal belief, but statements of what someone says *individuals must believe* to be in fellowship with them. It follows from this that a denominational creed must be a condition of communion in a specific coalition of congregations. This concept did not exist among New Testament Christians.

Thus, *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (Presbyterian), *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, *The Methodist Discipline*, etc. are not personal statements of belief, but authoritative (that is, based upon human authority) standards of fellowship other

than the Bible. When one is involved in denominationalism, he is subject to human authority rather than divine authority.

For example, the *Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* prescribes allegiance to it as a condition of fellowship in that denomination:

Let none be received into full connection unless they give evidence of a renewed heart, by living up to the requirements of the General Rules, ... (6) Do you subscribe to our articles of religion, our General Rules, and our Discipline, and are you willing to be governed by the same? (*Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* [North Chili, NY: B. T. Roberts, Publisher, 1887], p. 24.)

Be assured, none of Christ's apostles or other early Christians, nor any Christians for eighteen hundred years after Christ subscribed to the requirements of the General Rules of the Free Methodist Church. They never heard of the rules, or the denomination! These simply did not exist in New Testament times.

Similarly, one must hold to the creeds of the Lutheran church to be in that denomination. In *Our Church and Others*, published by the Evangelical Lutheran denomination, we read:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the total of all who unreservedly accept all canonical books of the Old and New Testament as God's revealed Word and who confess agreement with the teaching again brought to light through Luther's reformation and presented concisely in writing to Emperor and Empire at Augsburg in 1530 and repeated and expanded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols.

If someone asks a Lutheran: "What does the Lutheran Church teach?" or: "What do you as a Lutheran believe?" he can direct the inquirer to the Lutheran confessions.

The Lutheran confessions may also be regarded as a standard around which Lutherans rally in their common defense of the doctrines of the Scriptures against error, or they may be regarded as a flag to

which the teachers of the church pledge loyalty. Every member of the Lutheran Church is expected to subscribe not only to the Bible but also to the confessions as a correct presentation of Biblical doctrines...

Therefore pastors and professors are asked at the time of their ordination or installation: "Dost thou accept the three Ecumenical Creeds—the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian—as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and dost thou reject all the errors which they condemn?" and: "Dost thou believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord as contained in the Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this one Scriptural faith?" *To both of these questions the candidate must answer, "I do."* The officiating minister then asks: "Dost thou solemnly promise that thou wilt perform the duties of thy office in accordance with these Confessions and that *all thy teaching* and thy administration of the Sacraments *shall be in conformity* with the Holy Scriptures and *with the afore-mentioned Confessions?"* (Lewis W. Spitz, Ph.D., *Our Church and Others* [St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969], pp. 23-26.)

In addition, one who holds to the Bible and *The Methodist Discipline* will become a Methodist, not a Baptist. To be a Baptist, one must hold to the *Baptist Manual* plus the Bible. However, we cannot follow that course and become a Mormon. Mormons are those who hold to both the Bible and the *Book of Mormon*.

One last illustration that shows denominationalism is not produced by difficulties of interpretation but by adherence to denomi-

national creeds is found in the following statement from Edward T. Hiscox's *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*:

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but "One Lord, one faith, and one baptism," and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act, constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, "baptism was the door into the church." Now, it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their "experience," and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. (Edward T. Hiscox, D. D., *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890], p. 22.)

It's an absolute impossibility to follow just the Bible and become involved in these denominations or any others. None of them existed in Bible times.

The Harm of Denominational Creeds

We've all been around denominational creeds all our lives. Are they as innocuous as many think?

Creeds Hinder Fellowship

One of the arguments for the existence of creeds is that they are necessary for unity. While they produce unity *within the denomination*, on a scale larger than the denomination, they produce exactly the opposite. *Creeds are walls that prevent the fellowship of believers in Christ* in different denominations, in the sense that fellowship is contemplated in the Bible.

Creeds Impeach the Wisdom of God

Will the Bible as God gave it produce the unity God desires? If it won't, we imply that men must write creeds because God didn't know what to say.

Creeds Impugn the Good Will of Christ

If Christ were wise enough to give us everything we needed (which he promised to do in Jn. 14.26, 16.13, and that the apostles affirmed he did, II Tim. 3.16; II Pet. 1.3; Jude 3), but he didn't, then if God's wisdom is not impeached, Christ's goodness must be. Did Christ deliberately reveal the Bible in such an ambiguous fashion that it remained for men to write creeds to make God's meaning understandable?

Creeds Harm Believers in Christ

Creeds not only harm the reputation of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who brought the complete revelation into the world, but they *cause inestimable harm to believers in Christ*. Rather than obey Paul's command to test everything to see if it's genuine (I Thes. 5.21), and "prove what is well pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5.8-11), if we place our confidence in creeds, we are obliged to approach the Bible with an interpretation already placed upon it. Obeying the apostle's teaching requires us to examine the scriptures with no established opinion. If we place our confidence in creeds, we are not so free to examine the scriptures for ourselves. We are compelled to conduct our investigations in light of the creed. Thus, creeds are opposed to independent Bible study and those of us who would profit thereby. Human creeds simply did not exist in the time of Christ, his apostles, or early-day Christians.

The atheist's argument from religious division is still unanswerable. When we understand the great harm of religious division, we cannot be benevolent toward denominationalism and maintain our allegiance to Christ.

How to Be Just a Christian

This section presents a concise method of learning the gospel of Christ. It is designed to teach us the gospel in one sitting. It teaches how to be in fellowship with God in the universal church, and then teaches us how to find a group of Christians we can be in fellowship with in a local congregation. The approach consists of three charts that depict a simple three point outline:

Chart One: Allegiance To God

Chart Two: Fellowship With God**Chart Three: Fellowship With Other Christians**

The study begins at a point that is ordinarily satisfactory. If we believe in the existence of God, and have some respect for the inspiration of the Bible, this method will result in our learning the simple gospel of Christ with no appeal to denominational creeds, allegiance, or loyalty.

Regardless of what Bible questions we might have, we always began at the same foundation point: the Bible is the final authority in God's dealings with man. We all realize religion and politics are the most controversial topics in our society today, which most people try to avoid. One way to avoid the unpleasantness of controversy in religious discussions is to appeal to a common source of authority. For example, if we argue about how long the kitchen table is, or how warm the room is, a number of ways exist to settle these questions. We could agree that since I'm the oldest, or the youngest, or the most handsome, or the ugliest person in the group, we could take my word in the matter. At least, we would all be agreed. However, if we accept common standards of authority, like a ruler and a thermometer, we can settle all these differences, and we will all be correct!

The same thing is true in determining God's will in religious matters, and we will probably agree that the Bible should be our standard of authority. The first chart demonstrates this truth in detail. I'm confident we won't have any major differences on the first chart. Everybody understands Christians ought to follow the teaching of Christ, just as Buddhists ought to follow the teaching of Buddha.

Chart One: Allegiance To God

Let's just begin where the Bible begins, "In the beginning, God..." All authority stems from God because God has authority over everything, and our allegiance should be to him. Even an atheist will admit that "if God exists, he has all authority." God has all authority because he created everything, and everything belongs to him. Just like I have authority over my things (my car, my Bible), then since everything belongs to God, he has inherent authority over everything simply because of who he is.

Jesus Has Delegated Authority: Mt. 28.18, Jn. 12.49

We begin our reading in Mt. 28.18, where Jesus said to his apostles shortly after his resurrection and just before his ascension into heaven

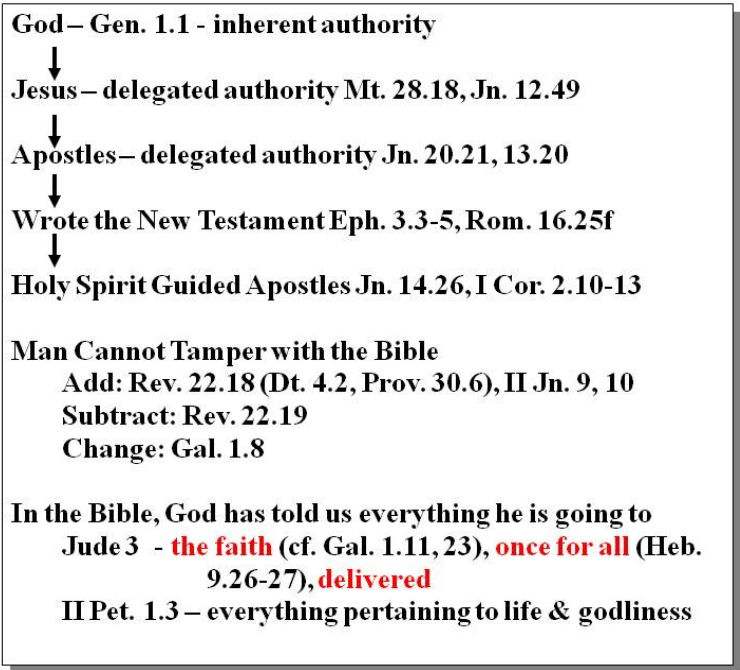
All authority hath been given unto me in heaven
and on earth.

Isn't it obvious who delegated authority to Jesus? We can readily see that God the Father delegated authority to Jesus. Even Jesus had divine authority from God for everything he said and did. Since Jesus had all authority both in heaven and on earth, he does not lack any authority whatsoever.

The next passage used to demonstrate the fact that Jesus had delegated authority from God is Jn. 12.49, where Jesus spoke to his apostles the night before he died:

For I speak not from myself: but the Father that

(Allegiance to God)



sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

Again, Jesus respected divine authority in all his activity. He didn't just do and teach what he wanted, but he always acted with authority from the Father. If Jesus had such respect for divine authority, can we be so presumptuous as to have less?

The Apostles Had Delegated Authority: Jn. 20.21; Jn. 13.20

Jesus then delegated authority to his apostles, those he sent out with his gospel. In Jn. 20.21, shortly after his resurrection, Jesus told the eleven apostles, with Judas absent from the group:

Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

Likewise, in Jn. 13.20 on the night before he died, Jesus said to the apostles:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

This verse is a little complicated on first glance. We receive the apostles by accepting their teaching and obeying it. To receive the apostles' teaching is also to receive Christ, and to receive Christ is to receive God. Conversely, if we reject the teaching of the apostles, we also reject Christ, and hence God himself.

Christ's Apostles Wrote the Bible: Eph. 3.3-5

With divine authority delegated to them by Christ, the apostles wrote the New Testament. Paul claims this in Eph. 3.3-4:

...how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote before in few words, whereby when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.

The mystery Paul speaks about is nothing but the gospel of Christ (Rom. 16.25-26). The gospel is called a mystery simply be-

cause it was not revealed in the Old Testament period of time, as Paul affirmed in Eph. 3.5.

Having established this, notice that Paul declared that when one reads the gospel, he can perceive Paul's understanding of the gospel. This is remarkable because most people believe one must be a preacher or have attended a seminary to understand the Bible. Paul said the gospel is written for the common man, and so it can be understood. (Eph. 5.17 even commands us to understand it!)

However, the main point from this passage is that the gospel was made known unto Paul and the other apostles by revelation. It was revealed to the apostles from God himself.

The Holy Spirit Guided the Apostles: Jn. 14.26; I Cor. 2.10-13

Most of us realize that neither God nor Jesus would make a mistake in the Bible, but sometimes we might reasonably wonder if the apostles could make mistakes. Jesus eliminated this possibility by having the Holy Spirit guide the apostles so that their teaching would be infallible. In Jn. 14.26, Jesus told his apostles the night before he was put to death, that the Holy Spirit would guide their teaching:

But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.

We often hear these verses applied to many people other than the apostles, but only the apostles received this promise. Only the apostles were given a remembrance of all that Jesus had told them, which would include statements Jesus made that are not even recorded in the Bible. If someone claims that this promise was given to him, it is a simple claim to test: just see if he can remember everything Jesus told the apostles that *is recorded in the Bible!*

The next passage, I Cor. 2.10-13, explains in what detail the Holy Spirit guided the apostles. In the most extensive passage in the Bible on its inspiration, Paul said:

But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the

things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth: combining spiritual things with spiritual words.

In this passage, Paul stated at least four great truths:

1. *Man has a conscious spirit that knows his things*, i.e., his desires, his likes, his dislikes, his goals, etc. (This truth contradicts those who don't believe man has a conscious spirit.)

2. *We don't know a man's likes and dislikes unless he tells us*. This is easy to demonstrate: "Do I like eggplant or black walnut ice cream?" You have no way of knowing unless I tell you, thus demonstrating the truth of Paul's statement. We simply don't know the things of a man unless his spirit tells us.

3. *We don't know God's things, i.e., his likes, dislikes, or his will unless he tells us*. Just because we like something doesn't mean God likes it, too. We simply don't know what God likes unless he tells us, for we don't even know the desires of a man unless he tells us. If we presume to know what God likes without his telling us, we do not act by confidence or faith in God, but confidence in our own wisdom. This is why we must have divine authority for what we do to serve God.

4. *These verses also reveal the Bible doctrine of inspiration*, i.e., verbal inspiration. The apostle Paul specifically denies that the apostles wrote the Bible according to their own wisdom. They wrote according to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, even down to the very words they used. Thus, when we read the Bible, we have access to the precise words authorized by God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We May Not Add to the Bible: Rev. 22.18; II Jn. 9

Since God placed the very words he wanted into the Bible, we can be sure that he won't appreciate our adding to them. In Rev. 22.18, John said:

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:

In this context, this prohibition against adding to God's word includes only the book of Revelation. However, it illustrates a principle God has always desired man to honor. For example, in Dt. 4.2 and Prov. 30.6, God taught the same thing in the beginning and the middle of the Bible. The same principle is also spelled out in II Jn. 9-11, where John said:

Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

This passage teaches several important truths: (1) If we are not content to stay within the truth that came from Christ, i.e., the Bible, we do not have God. That is, we do not please God, we are not in fellowship with God, and God does not dwell in us. (2) We shouldn't support teachers who do not affirm that one must abide in the teaching of Christ to be in fellowship with God. **NOTE:** To affirm that we should be governed solely by the teaching of Christ with no allegiance to denominational creeds doesn't mean that we understand Christ's teaching flawlessly (for none of us do), nor does it mean that our religious group has a monopoly on the truth of God. It simply means that, as imperfect as our understanding of his word may be, we're determined not to waste any time or effort maintaining uniformity or allegiance to doctrines rooted in denominational creeds.

So far, we've used Bible teaching for everything we've said. Suppose after a while I put down something without a substantiating Bible passage, and when you ask me for a Bible verse, I reply, "The Bible doesn't say that, that's just the way it is." What should you do? If you say, "That's where I'll quit studying your material!" that's good!

(3) This passage also declares that when we act without the authority of the teaching of Christ, our works are evil. They are presumptuous works, not works of faith.

We May Not Subtract from the Bible: Rev. 22.19

Similarly, in Rev. 22.19, John forbids us to subtract from God's word:

...and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

We May Not Change the Bible: Gal. 1.8:

In Gal. 1.8, Paul affirmed:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.

This verse contains two remarkable statements: (1) If one of the apostles arose from the dead and taught something not in the Bible, he should be anathema, that is, accursed, set apart for destruction. (2) Even if an angel came to earth and taught us something not in the Bible, he ought to be set apart for destruction, too. (To Mormons, this should mean that even if Joseph Smith saw an angel on the hillside in New York, he should have told the angel to get lost!)

These are impressive truths. The Bible is as authoritative as if God himself spoke out of heaven. It is divine truth.

In the Bible, God Has Told Us Everything He Will Tell Us: Jude 3; II Pet. 1.3

God makes it clear that he doesn't want us to tamper with his word. The reason is because in the Bible, God has told us everything he will tell us in this life. In Jude 3, Jude said:

Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.

"The faith" Jude spoke of is nothing but the gospel. See Gal. 1.11 where Paul said he preached "the gospel," and Gal. 1.23, where he said he preached "the faith." "The gospel" is called "the

faith” because it contains a system of salvation by faith, and because it produces faith (Rom. 10.17).

Thus, Jude professes that the gospel was delivered once for all. We have seen how the gospel was delivered, i.e., from God, through Christ, through the Holy Spirit, through the apostles, to us on earth. The term “once for all” means *once so that it needs no repetition*. For example, in Heb. 9.27-28, Paul declares with this same term that Christ was *once* offered, and man dies *once*. We die exactly as many times as Christ died, once for all. This verse contends the gospel was delivered exactly that many times, once for all.

For the last verse on the first chart, Peter said in II Pet. 1.3:

...seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue...

Peter maintains that the Bible doesn’t claim to teach us everything on every subject, but it does claim to teach us *everything we need to know* on every subject *to please God*. Obviously, we cannot read the best recipe for chili in the Bible, nor can we read the best brand of automobile to buy. We can be ignorant of those matters and still please God. Everything we need to have true life and please God is revealed in the Bible! This is precisely why God does not want us to tamper with the Bible.

This completes the first chart. If we are determined to obey God according to his revealed will without addition and subtraction, we can complete the study and become a Christian. Also, any issue that comes up in our service of Christ must be settled by the Bible, or some truth on this first chart must be violated.

TIP ON DENOMINATIONAL CREEDS: Before leaving this chart, we want to notice how denominational creeds are standards of allegiance that do not fit the pattern we’ve just learned. For example, we must hold to the creeds of the Lutheran church to be in fellowship with that denomination. In *Our Church and Others*, published by the Evangelical Lutheran denomination, we read:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the total of all who unreservedly accept all canonical books of the Old and New Testament as God’s revealed

Word and who confess agreement with the teaching again brought to light through Luther's reformation and presented concisely in writing to Emperor and Empire at Augsburg in 1530 and repeated and expanded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols. (Lewis W. Spitz, Ph.D., *Our Church and Others* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969], p. 23.)

On the next page, we read the following:

The Lutheran Church is a Bible church. She receives the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, as the only source and standard of doctrine, the sole authority in matters of faith and life. (*Ibid.*, p. 24.)

Yet just across the page, we have:

If someone asks a Lutheran: "What does the Lutheran Church teach?" or: "What do you as a Lutheran believe?" he can direct the inquirer to the Lutheran confessions...The Lutheran confessions may also be regarded as a standard around which Lutherans rally in their common defense of the doctrines of the Scriptures against error, or they may be regarded as a flag to which the teachers of the church pledge loyalty. Every member of the Lutheran Church is expected to subscribe not only to the Bible but also to the confessions as a correct presentation of Biblical doctrines... (*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.)

These quotations establish how one becomes an Evangelical Lutheran: he must have allegiance for Jesus according to his teaching in the Bible, as well as loyalty for the creed of that denomination. Most people have no idea where denominations come from, believing perhaps that they result from different interpretations of difficult passages in the Bible. This quotation demonstrates that *the problem is one of divided allegiance, not difficult interpretation.*

Just like allegiance to the Bible and the Lutheran creeds produces a Lutheran, so the Bible plus the *Methodist Discipline* produces not a Lutheran, but a Methodist. Likewise, using the Bible

with the *Seventh-Day Adventist Manual* produces a Seventh-Day Adventist. The standard of allegiance in the Roman Catholic Church is the Bible along with the traditions of the church. We can avoid all this religious confusion by determining to follow just the Bible without adding to or subtracting from it.

Chart Two: Fellowship With God

Once we settle on the Bible as our only standard of authority, we can then consider Chart Two, which shows how to get into fellowship with God. We begin before the creation:

God Planned to Save Us in Christ: Eph. 1.3-4

In Eph. 1.3-4, Paul said:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

The verses in the early part of Ephesians 1 are very meaty. While we might like to examine many things at length, we want to observe that before the foundation of the world, before God ever created Adam and Eve, he planned for the salvation of man, and his plan involved Jesus Christ. Rather than using Christ as an auxiliary effort in his dealings with man, God always planned to save man in Christ.

When Christ Shed His Blood, He Purchased the Church: Ac. 20.28

We next notice Ac. 20.28, where Paul, speaking to the elders from the church at Ephesus, said:

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.

When Christ came, he died and shed his blood, and with his blood he purchased “the church,” that is, a group of people who were redeemed with Christ’s blood. That redeemed group of peo

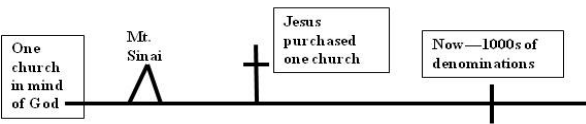
Fellowship with God

God Planned to Save Us in Christ Eph. 1.3-4

With his blood, he purchased the church Ac. 20.28

God also planned that church Eph. 3.10-11

Christ only purchased one church Eph. 1.22, 4.4



Two ways to be in fellowship with God

1. Flawless works Gal. 3.10, Jas. 2.10 (could be done, Dt. 30.6)
2. Perfect faith Rom. 1-6
 all have sinned
 Rom. 1, 2, 3 – all Gentiles/Jews/everyone – 3.23
 how saved then?
 Rom. 3.21 – apart from Law of Moses
 Rom. 4.1-3, 6 Like Abraham & David
 Rom. 4.11-12 Us too cf. Jas. 2.22-24
 cf. *Methodist Discipline*
 Here's How: Rom. 6.3-6, 17-18
 Manner of Life: Rom. 6.1-2, 16-18, 22

Do you want newness of life in Christ?

ple was also in the eternal plan of God. In Eph. 3.10-11, Paul, speaking of the universal church, said:

...God created all things to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:...

God's eternal plan to save men in Christ and Christ purchasing the church with his blood were not two isolated events, for the church was also in God's eternal plan. As a matter of fact, these verses state two great truths: (1) God's plan for the church was from all eternity before the creation just like his plan for salvation in Christ was, and (2) the church was to show the manifold wisdom of God.

The fact that God designed the church to show his eternal wisdom needs to be impressed upon us all. The church Christ purchased ought to show God's wisdom, not ours. When we seek to change something about the church that was designed to show God's wisdom, in effect, we place our own wisdom over God's infinite eternal wisdom.

How Many Churches Did Christ Purchase? Eph. 1.22-23, 4.4

To show that just one relationship exists in which men may be redeemed by Christ's blood, notice Eph. 1.22-23 where Paul said:

...and he put all things in subjection under his feet,
and gave him to be head over all things to the
church, which is his body, the fulness of him that
filleth all in all.

Accordingly, Paul spoke of God putting all things under Christ, which is the same thing Jesus said in the first verse we used in this study ("All authority hath been given unto me [Jesus—SGD] in heaven and on earth" Mt. 28.18). Paul added that Christ is the head of the church, which is the body of Christ. In Eph. 4.4, Paul also said concerning Christ's body, "There is one body."

Thus, just one universal church, the body of Christ, exists. It consists of all those redeemed by Christ's blood, and who are in fellowship with God through Christ's redemption.

These passages in Ephesians are tremendously instructive. Since the relationship between Christ and his church are like that of the head and body, we learn that just as one head exists, so is there just one body. Likewise, just as in the human body, the head controls the body in its entirety, so it is with Christ. Everything his church does ought to be controlled by Christ through his word. This is the same lesson we learned on the first chart: God's people must have divine authority for all they do to act by faith in Christ.

How to Be in Fellowship with God

This approach is based upon briefly summarizing the first six chapters of Romans:

Romans 1: All Gentiles Have Sinned

Romans 1 shows that all Gentiles (non-Jews) have sinned, and stand condemned before God.

Romans 2: All Jews Have Sinned

Romans 2 shows that all Jews have sinned, and stand condemned before God.

Romans 3: All Have Sinned

Romans 3 shows that both all Jews and all Gentiles have sinned, and therefore all men stand condemned before God. As Paul summarizes in Rom. 3.23:

...for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3.21: God Saves Us Without Flawless Obedience

As Paul said in Rom. 3.21:

But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifest, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction;...

Thus, God planned a way to make men who have sinned righteous, a way that is based upon faith in Christ.

Rom. 4.1-3, 6: Abraham and David

Romans 3-4 illustrates the salvation by faith of two men, Abraham and David. Neither of these men were saved by a perfect understanding of God's will or by perfect obedience to God. They were both justified upon the basis of their faith in God.

Rom. 4.11-12, 22-25; Us Too: cf. Jas. 2.24

In Rom. 4.11-12, Paul stated that we can be saved the same way Abraham was:

...and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned unto them: and the father of circumcision to them who not only are of the circumcision, but who also *walk in the steps of that faith* of our father Abraham which he had in uncircumcision.

So Abraham is the father of those who share his kind of faith. This faith is not mere mental assent, but obedient faith, *faith that one can walk in the steps of* as Abraham did. James spoke of this faith in Jas. 2.18-24 when he said:

Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from they works, and I by my works will show thee my faith. Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe, and shudder. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.

James asserted the same thing Paul did, that Abraham's faith was perfect faith, faith that wrought with his works. These were not works of merit, but works of faith in God. Paul affirmed we are justified on the basis of the same kind of faith.

TIP ON JAMES 2.24: Before leaving this passage, another quotation from a denominational creed will help us see that denominational divisions are not produced by varied interpretations of difficult scriptures. For example, the *Discipline of the Methodist Church*, the creed of the Methodist denomination, states:

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not of our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort. (*Discipline of the Methodist Church*, edited by Emory Stevens Bucke [Nashville, TN: The Methodist Publishing House, 1960], p. 32.)

Comparing Jas. 2.24 with the *Methodist Discipline*, which one do we want? If our allegiance is to Christ, we must take the Bible.

Rom. 6.3-6, 17-18: Here's How

Romans 6.3-6 shows how early Christians exercised Abraham's kind of faith:

Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin.

In verses 17-18 of the same chapter, Paul explained further:

But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered: and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness.

Paul shows in both of these passages that early Christians exercised saving faith when they, as penitent sinners, obeyed their Lord in baptism, and thus entered newness of life: fellowship with God. This is in accord with the proclamation of the gospel the first time it was preached in Acts 2. When the apostle Peter convinced

the Jews that they had actually killed the very Messiah they were looking for, we read in Ac. 2.37-38:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins: and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

These individuals were baptized for the remission of their sins, not because baptism was a work of merit, but because it exercised Abraham's kind of faith. In connection with this command, in Ac. 2.41, we read:

They then that received his word were baptized:...

Recall earlier in our study that Jesus said (in Jn. 12.49):

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me: and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Those who received the teaching of the apostle Peter were baptized, and it was the same as receiving Jesus on that occasion. If we receive Jesus now we do the same thing: we receive his word and are baptized for the remission of our sins.

TIP ON BAPTISM: Depending on your religious background and receptiveness to the teaching of these passages on baptism, we display the following simple outline. It basically shows the who, what, and why of baptism.

Who Is to Be Baptized?

Mk. 16.16: Believers (not infants, or mentally incompetent people)

Col. 2.13: Those with faith in the working of God (again, those who can understand the gospel and resolve to obey Christ out of allegiance to him)

Ac. 2.38: Penitent believers

Rom. 6.5: The old man (not the new man, not Christians)

How to Be Baptized

Jn. 3.23: Baptism requires much water (sprinkling and pouring don't)

Ac. 8.38: Going down into water is required

Rom. 6.3-4: Baptism is a burial (like Christ was buried)

Col. 2.12: Baptism is a burial

Why Be Baptized?

Rom. 6.4: For newness of life

Col. 2.13: To be made alive, forgiven

Ac. 2.38: For remission of sins

Mk. 16.16: To be saved

Ac. 22.16: For sins to be washed away

I Cor. 1.13: To be called a "Christian"

Comparing this teaching with two denominational creeds helps demonstrate that the controversy about baptism is not a problem of interpretation. It is a problem of allegiance! For example, in *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life*, Jehovah's Witnesses make the following statement concerning baptism:

What, then does Christian baptism signify? It is not a washing away of one's sins. (*The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life* [Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1968], p. 183.)

Likewise, our Baptist friends deny the Bible's teaching concerning the necessity of baptism. Notice carefully the following words from *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* by Edward T. Hiscox, D.D.:

Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of "baptismal regeneration"; but it is essential to obedience since Christ has commanded it. (Edward T. Hiscox, D.D., *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* [Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890], p. 21.)

On the next page we read:

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,” and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act, constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, “baptism was the door into the church.” Now, it is different... (*Ibid.*, p. 22.)

Given the choice of these books or the Bible, which should we choose? No one should take a denominational creed over what the Bible says on the subject.

Rom. 6.1-2, 16-18; 22: Manner of Life

Completing our study of Romans 1-6, we then note the manner of life we should live after we become a Christian, again based on our faith in Christ. In Rom. 6.1-2, Paul said:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?

In Rom. 6.16-18 Paul continued along this same line:

Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered: and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness.

Finally, in Rom. 6.22 Paul said:

But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life.

All Based on Confidence in Christ

Through perfect faith in Christ we can enjoy fellowship with God, and be in the universal church or the body of Christ. We've seen the manner of life we are expected to live, and it's all based on confidence in Christ.

Do You Want Newness of Life in Christ?

Do you want newness of life in Christ, or fellowship with God? You can have it by exercising Abraham's kind of faith, obedient faith. If you understand how people in the New Testament came into fellowship with God through Christ, would you like to confess your faith in Christ and your determination to live according to his will to the best of your ability, and be baptized into him to be in fellowship with God?

If so, you should be baptized into newness of life. This will put you into the universal church, the collection of all who are in fellowship with God through the blood of Christ.

If you say, "I'm not sure," I remind you that you read every one of these verses for yourself. If you were baptized and the next day saw in the morning paper a picture of me with a bottle of whiskey in one hand and a blond in the other, standing in front of a bank that I had just robbed, that wouldn't prove your baptism was wrong. Your understanding and obedience doesn't depend on me, does it? Again, would you like to be baptized into Christ for newness of life?

If you are a young person or married, and you want to talk to your parents or spouse before obeying the gospel, I don't discourage such. However, I remind you of Jesus' statement in Mt. 10.37:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

If you understand what it means to obey the gospel, and just say, "No, I don't want newness of life," or "No, I don't want to live that manner of life," I've done the best I can. I urge you to remember what you've learned in this study, for you've probably learned a great deal. In the future you will have a lot of teaching to fall back on that you did not have before.

Chart Three: Fellowship With Other Christians

After we have been baptized into Christ, we need to learn about establishing fellowship in a local congregation of Christians. This is the purpose of Chart Three.

Fellowship with Other Christians

God desires such: Local churches I Cor. 1.1, Eph. 1.1, Gal. 1.1 – even Apostle Paul Ac. 9.26, 28

Caution: I Tim. 5.22, Eph. 5.11

Financially supporting error Phil. 4.15-16, 1.4-7, III Jn. 5-8, II Jn. 9-11

What to look for in a local church

Uses Bible as only standard – Allegiance to God – Chart 1

Teaches how to be in fellowship with God – Chart 2

Name: Ac. 11.26 – No exclusive proper name, church of God, church of Christ

Organization Phil. 1.1

Elders: Ac. 14.23, 20.28 (Qual. I Tim. 3.1-7)

Deacons: Phil. 1.1 (Qual. I Tim. 3.8ff)

Saints: Phil. 1.1

TIP ON ORGANIZATION:

Worship

Prayer – Ac. 2.42

Teaching – Ac. 2.42

Lord's Supper – I Cor. 10.14-27, 11.24-29 – remembered body and blood

Singing – Ac. 2.47, I Cor. 14.13-19, Eph. 5.29, Col. 3.16

Giving – for evangelism, benevolence, edification, not tithing (not wages, but of flocks, crops, herds, to Levitical priests, to storehouse in temple, Mal. 3.10)

but freewill I Cor. 16.2, II Cor. 9.6-7

Such a church should be joined

God Desires It: Local Churches

From the beginning of the New Testament church God has desired for his people to associate and work together in local churches. This is easily established by noticing the local congregations to whom the apostles addressed letters that compose much of the New Testament, i.e., the letters to the church at Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the church at Rome, the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and the seven churches of Asia in Revelation.

God certainly could have made man so he didn't need the mutual provocation unto love and good works that is available to him in a local congregation. But the fact is, God did not so make man.

Even the Apostle Paul: Ac. 9.26, 13.1, 28.11 cf. Phil. 1.14

Ac. 9.26 and 13.1 show how Paul associated with local churches. Ac. 28.11 depicts Paul being encouraged by brethren in Rome, while Phil. 1.14 describes his emboldening them to teach others. The example of Paul demonstrates that if a Christian of our time thinks he doesn't need the mutual consideration and provocation unto love and good works that early Christians did, he is making himself greater than the apostle Paul

Caution: I Tim. 5.22; Eph. 5.11

When we consider associating with a group of Christians, we need to exercise caution so that we will not get involved in the sins of others. Paul warns about this in I Tim. 5.22:

Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure..

Similarly, in Eph. 5.11 Paul instructed:

...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them;...

Financially Supporting Error: Phil. 4.15-16, 1.5-7; III Jn. 5-8; II Jn. 9-11

One prominent way a Christian can partake in another's error is by financially supporting it. In Phil. 4.15-16, Paul taught positively that when we support a good spiritual work, we are partners in that work, and God regards it so:

And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only; for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account.

In Phil. 1.5-7, Paul commented along this same line when he thanked them for their

...fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now...in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace.

By financially supporting the collective work of a local church, we may actually accomplish much more in the propagation of the gospel than we could accomplish as individuals. It is with this principle in mind that John said in III Jn. 5-8:

Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal; who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God, because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth.

The negative side of this principle is if we support a collective work that is not scriptural, then we're not fellow-workers for the truth, but fellow-workers in that error. Thus, in II John 9-11, we have:

Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and

give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

John does not prohibit inviting a Christian we have a doctrinal difference with to our home to study the issue. This passage is in the context of supporting a false teacher, one who shows disregard for the necessity of abiding in the teaching of Christ. If we support teaching not based upon the teaching of Christ, then we become a partaker (we're in fellowship) in that evil work.

What to Look for in a Local Church

At the outset, one should look for a congregation where the Bible is the only standard of authority, as per Chart One. Second, only local churches which teach scripturally how to be in fellowship with God, as per Chart Two. Beyond that, a new Christian needs to know what to look for in a local congregation. The Bible does not use the criteria that people so many times use. For example, the Bible's criteria are not entertainment or mere convenient location, large crowds, or certain age groups. On the other hand, a Christian needs to be concerned about getting involved in scriptural collective action. Note some examples of scriptural collective activity:

Name: Ac. 11.26—"Christian"

Local churches in the New Testament were called "churches of Christ" in Rom. 16.16, a "church of God" in I Cor. 1.2, or many times simply "the church," that is, God's people in a specific location. These were not exclusive proper names. Of course, the use of denominational names like "St. Matthew's Lutheran" etc., would involve us in unscriptural collective action. On an individual basis, according to Ac. 11.26, in New Testament times disciples of Christ were called simply "Christians."

Organization

The organization of the local congregation is important. In contrast to complex denominational organizations so prevalent in the world today, the organization of the local church in the New Testament was extremely simple. It consisted of elders, deacons, and saints.

Elders: Ac. 14.23, 20.28

In Ac. 14.23, while Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey, they helped appoint a plurality of elders in each local church. In Ac. 20.28 Paul makes it clear that the elders' authority is limited to the local church where they serve. I Pet. 5.1-2 teaches the same thing. A new Christian needs to be impressed that he should not associate with a congregation involved in collective action larger than a local church, i.e., denominational action.

In Ac. 20.28 and I Pet. 5.1-3 the terms elders, bishops (overseers), and shepherds (pastors) are used interchangeably of the same group of men. The elders are a very highly qualified group of older men whose qualifications are found in I Tim. 3.1-7 and Tit. 1.5-11. They are mature Christians, married, teachers, parents who rule their families well, and have high qualifications of character.

Deacons: Phil. 1.1

In addition, local churches should have deacons who function under the oversight of the elders as specially designated servants. Of course, all Christians are servants, but these deacons are also highly qualified men. I Tim. 3.8ff contain a brief summary of the qualifications of deacons.

Saints: Phil. 1.1

Phil. 1.1 shows the simplicity of the organization of the local church in the New Testament:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all
the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with
the bishops and deacons:

Bishops and deacons we've seen before. The only other individuals in the local church are "saints." Since this term is tremendously abused in the religious realm, the student may think in terms of Roman Catholic saints, i.e., notable Christians who have been dead for a number of years, worked four miracles, and have been voted on by the College of Cardinals in Rome. However, the term denotes plain ordinary Christians whose lives are sanctified or set apart for the service of God; hence they are saints.

TIP ON ORGANIZATION: After seeing the simplicity of the organization of a New Testament church, we can appreciate how simple the Bible's organization is compared to denominational organizations. We could draw a pyramid and see that nearly all denominational organizations can be depicted using the same picture. For example, the Roman Catholic church has local congregations, dioceses, etc. on the lower level up to Metropolitans and Cardinals with the Pope at the top of the organization. Although the titles are different, Mormons have essentially the same organization with their Prophet, Apostles, Seventies, etc. So with Jehovah's Witnesses with their districts, regions, branches, and zones; and mainline protestant denominations with their synods, conferences, etc. In contrast to these complicated forms of organization, Christians in New Testament times had no organization or allegiance larger than a local church.

God's wisdom shows in this arrangement. While the leadership of a local church may be corrupted and carry the whole congregation away from the Lord, since New Testament churches were completely independent, corruption in one congregation wouldn't have to affect another church at all. Contrast this with denominations where the hierarchy makes decisions that the grassroots level congregations are told to either "like it or lump it!"

ANOTHER TIP ON ORGANIZATION: *The Methodist Discipline* shows how complicated denominational organization can be, and none of it is in the Bible. My copy of this volume runs over 700 pages. The last 650 pages contain the headings that read like "The Quarterly Conference," "The Church Conference," "The Official Board," "Episcopacy," "The General Conference," "The Jurisdictional Conference," "The Central Conference," "Provisional Central Conferences," "The Annual Conference," "The District Conference," "The Judicial Conference," "Coordinating Council," "Interboard Commission," "Board of Missions," "Board of Education," "Board of Evangelism," "Board of Lay Activities," "Board of Christian Social Concerns," "Commission on Worship," "Commission on Chaplains," "Commission on Church Union," "Interagency Commissions," "Council of Secretaries," "Interdenominational Agencies," "General Board of Pensions," "Annual Conference Organizations," "Judicial Council," "Quadrennial Commissions," etc., etc. Not a verse of scripture is cited for any of it! With the simplicity of the New Testament church in mind, this is astounding. If someone were to ask us which we want, the de-

nominal creed or the New Testament, if we are interested in being just a Christian, we will invariably take the scriptures.

This completes the organization of the local church. Of course, any change man makes in the organization reflects on the wisdom of God himself.

Worship

To describe the worship of the local church as it was in the New Testament, we cover the following topics with their associated passages:

Prayer: I Tim. 2.8

I've never had anyone object to prayer in the worship of a local congregation. Any number of passages suffice for showing its necessity.

Lord's Supper: I Cor. 10.14-27, 11.24-29 – remembering the body and blood of the Lord

Here Paul addresses problems the Corinthians were having with the Lord's Supper, that they were not properly considering the body and blood of the Lord.

Singing: Eph. 5.19

No one argues that New Testament Christians sang in their worship. However, most people are used to mechanical instruments of music in denominational worship. If you are interested in mechanical music, I'm not personally opposed to it, and would personally like it, providing we can do it out of our allegiance to Christ. If Christ taught it, I want it. If he didn't, we must leave it alone.

TIP ON INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC: The Old Testament contains many references to instrumental music. In II Chron. 29.25, God gave the Levitical musicians specific instruction for instrumental music in their collective worship in the tabernacle and temple service. If the New Testament contains a similar passage, we should have instrumental music as well.

If someone says playing an instrument is a God-given talent and therefore should be introduced into Christian worship, I recall

a friend who is an airline pilot. He flies with a God-given talent, but no one thinks we should make flying his Boeing 747 a part of our collective worship. Neither do we let a welder use his God-given talent in our collective worship.

It is helpful to trace the history of instrumental music in so-called Christian worship century by century. No one affirms that instrumental music was used by the apostles or Christians in the New Testament. Passing into secular history, instruments weren't used in the second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth centuries.

The first mention of instrumental music in the worship of people called Christians occurred in the seventh century. Philip Schaff, a celebrated religious historian, wrote about how that effort was generally unsuccessful:

The use of organs in churches is ascribed to Pope Vitalian (657-672). Constantine Copronymos sent an organ with other presents to King Pepin of France in 767. Charlemagne received one as a present from the Caliph Haroun al Rashid, and had it put up in the cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle...The attitude of the churches toward the organ varies. It shared to some extent the fate of images except that it never was an object of worship...The Greek church disapproved the use of organs. The Latin church introduced it pretty generally, but not without the protest of eminent men, so that even in the Council of Trent a motion was made, though not carried, to prohibit the organ at least in the mass. (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, IV* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887], p. 439.)

Secular history is silent as to the instrument's use through the thirteenth century, except that in 1250 A.D., Thomas Aquinas objected to its use by Catholics, lest they "seem to Judaize," i.e., seem like the Jews:

Our church does not use musical instruments as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize. (Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church, II* [London: Reeves & Turner, 1878], p. 483.)

In the *Catholic Encyclopedia* we find:

For almost a thousand years the Gregorian chant, without any instrumental or harmonic addition was the only music used in connection with the liturgy. The organ, in its primitive and rude form, was the first, and for a long time, the sole, instrument used to accompany the chant. (*Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol X*, edited by Charles G. Herbermann [New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1911], p. 657.)

Long after Thomas Aquinas, a sixteenth century Catholic scholar named Erasmus, said:

We have brought into our churches certain operatic and theatrical music; such a confused, disorderly chattering of some words as I hardly think was ever in any of the Grecian or Roman theatres. The church rings with the noise of trumpets, pipes, and dulcimers; and human voices strive to bear their part with them. Men run to church as to a theatre, to have their ears tickled. And for this end organ makers are hired with great salaries, and a company of boys, who waste all their time learning these whining tones. (John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* [Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, Printers, 1888], p. 166.)

Although instrumental music in supposedly “Christian” worship originated within Roman Catholicism, thereby being the origin of the denominational use of it, it is astounding to notice the opposition the very founders of those denominations had to it. John Girardeau, Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary (Presbyterian), said

It has thus been proved, by an appeal to historical facts, that the church, although lapsing more and more into defection from the truth and into a corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental

music for twelve hundred years; and that the Calvinistic Reformed Church ejected it from its services as an element of Popery, even the Church of England having come very nigh to its extrusion from her worship. The historical argument, therefore, combines with the Scriptural and the confessional to raise a solemn and powerful protest against its employment by the Presbyterian Church. It is heresy in the sphere of worship. (*Ibid.*, p. 179.)

James Pierce, a Presbyterian scholar of the eighteenth century, said:

I come now to say somewhat of the antiquity of musical instruments. But that these were not used in the Christian Church in the primitive times is attested by all the ancient writers with one consent. Hence, they figuratively explain all the places of the Old Testament which speak of musical instruments, as I might easily show by a thousand testimonies out of Clement of Alexandria, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, and many others...From what has been said, it appears no musical instruments were used in the pure time of the church. (*Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.)

John Calvin, a founder of Presbyterianism, wrote:

Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to him. (John Calvin, *Commentary on Ps. 33 and on I Sam. 18.1-9*, cited by M. C. Kurfees, *Instrumental Music in the Worship* [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1969], p. 191.)

David Benedict, the Baptist historian, said:

In my earliest intercourse among this people, congregational singing generally prevailed among them...The Introduction of the Organ among the Baptists...This instrument, which from time immemorial has been associated with cathedral pomp and prelatical power, and has always been the peculiar favorite of the great national churches, at length found its way into Baptist sanctuaries, and the first one ever employed by the denomination in this country, and probably in any other, might have been standing in the singing gallery of the Old Baptist meeting house in Pawtucket, about forty years ago, when I then officiated as pastor (1840)...Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them...How far this modern organ fever will extend among our people, and whether it will on the whole work a *de*-formation or *re*-formation in their singing service, time will more fully develop. (David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* [Glen Rose, TX: Newman & Collins, 1913], pp. 204-207.)

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was quoted to say:

I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen. (John Wesley, cited by Adam Clarke, *Commentary, IV* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.], p. 686.)

Adam Clarke, a famous Methodist commentator, said of musical instruments:

I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason

to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, *as a science*, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity. (Adam Clarke, *Commentary, IV* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.], p. 686.)

In a discussion of the *Presbyterian Confession of Faith*, we find:

Question 6. Is there any authority for instrumental music in the worship of God under the present dispensation? Answer. Not the least; only the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs was appointed by the apostles; not a syllable is said in the New Testament in favor of instrumental music nor was it ever introduced into the Church until after the eighth century, after the Catholics had corrupted the simplicity of the gospel by their carnal inventions. It was not allowed in the Synagogues, the parish churches of the Jews; but was confined to the Temple service and was abolished with the rites of that dispensation. (*Questions on the Confession of Faith and Form of Government of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1842], p. 55.)

Even during the nineteenth century, nearly every denomination in the United States continued to fight its introduction. One hundred and fifty years ago, we would not even have discussed the subject, for no one except Catholics used it in “Christian worship.” Now those who do not use it are viewed as peculiar. However, the teaching of Christ has not changed since New Testament times. Those content to abide in the teaching of Christ will refrain from it until they find it sanctioned therein.

Teaching: Ac. 2.42

Giving: I Cor. 16.2; II Cor. 9.6, 7

These passages show Christians are to give bountifully, purposefully, and cheerfully into the treasury of their local congregation on the first day of the week (every week—NASV, NIV). The New Testament nowhere tells Christians to tithe, or to give ten percent of their capital gains. Israelites in the Old Testament were so commanded. Yet they didn't tithe their capital gains, but the produce of their flocks and agriculture. God commanded the Jews to bring the tithe to the Levitical priests so it could be stored in the storehouse in the temple (Mal. 3.10).

No one today does any of this. Preachers presume to bind tithing on people who are not under the Law of Moses. It's imposed on capital gains, not flocks, herds, and crops to feed the Levitical priests. No Levitical priests exist. No storehouse exists in the temple to put the tithe in.

Submit in Matters of Opinion

This series of passages demonstrates how Christians must work together in a local church. These passages do not require that we agree on everything in the Bible to be in fellowship, but they do require that we agree on what we do collectively. At the same time, we are to practice subjection by behaving ourselves toward each other in matters of opinion, expediency, and that which we're not agreed on. God has ordained that certain Christians submit to others:

All Submit to the Elders, Heb. 13.17

Younger Submit to Older: I Pet. 5.5; Heb. 5.13-14

All Submit to Laborers: I Cor. 16.15-16

Women Submit to Leading Men: I Tim. 2.11-12

All Submit to One Another: I Pet. 5.5; Eph. 5.21

Concerned for One Another: Rom. 12.5-8

Teaches Christians: Ac. 2.42

Such a Church Should Be Joined: Ac. 9.26

We enter the universal church, the body of Christ, when we are baptized into Christ. On the other hand, we join a local church. Luke said concerning Paul in Ac. 9.26:

And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

Paul wanted to join this local church. He was not seeking to join the universal church. He had been in it since he had obeyed the gospel, had his sins washed away, and had come into fellowship with God. This joining merely involved a declaration that he wanted to establish a mutually beneficial working relationship with those Christians.

Conclusion

This is the time to find a group of Christians without denominational allegiance, and in whose collective worship you can conscientiously participate.