



Volume III

By

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The Great Separation

Welcome to Volume III of our special series, Order in the Court of the King! If this is the first time you've read this series, please read the first two volumes to acquaint yourself with our views on God's Eternal Kingdom.

[Volume I](#)

[Volume II](#)

Very Good

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Genesis 1:31

When God completed creating the heavens, earth, and all that inhabits them, He looked at what He had done and saw that “it was very good.” God created everything according to an **orderly plan** that He designed in Eternity – **before time began**. However, it would not be orderly for long.

Part of God’s ‘Eternal Plan’ included a series of ‘tests’ for human beings. He stated His purpose for humanity clearly in Genesis 1 –

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds

of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Humanity had an amazing future, but it would not come without testing that would lead to the most amazing ‘gift’ God would give them – His Son.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:8-10

How did God know ‘before time began’ that His Son would abolish death and bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel? Where in Genesis 1 do we find anything about death? We don’t. We have to turn the Bible page to Genesis

2 to discover the first of many tests God would give to humans.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Genesis 2:16-17

That’s the first mention of ‘death’ in the Bible, but it was a test God had prepared ‘before time began.’ Whether death entered into the world was a decision that Adam would make. God tested Adam.

As we continue to read Genesis 2 we find that Adam, Eve, and all of the animals had a wonderful relationship with God. Though we are not told how long that relationship lasted, I think it was only for a very short time. The reason I believe that is because of what God purposed for humans – “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the

fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

It's obvious from what Adam said after God brought Eve to him that we see Adam's understanding of the purpose and process of being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth –

And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:23-25

Adam was naked and his wife was naked. They understood that they would come together sexually (become one flesh) to reproduce (multiply) and fill the earth.

Based on what I read in Genesis 1 and 2 there would have been nothing that would have hindered Adam and Eve from have sexual relations right away to begin the process of multiplying and filling the earth. However, we find no evidence of Adam and Eve having sexual relations until Genesis 4 –

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the Lord.” Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Genesis 4:1-2

Something happened between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 4:1 that kept Adam and Eve from fulfilling God’s will for humans – something that would have brought them great joy as they became ‘one flesh.’ I think the time between God creating Adam and his wife and things going ‘very bad’ may have only been a matter of hours or a few days at the most. Otherwise, I believe Adam and Eve would have joined together sexually to fulfill their purpose in God’s earthly Kingdom to ‘multiply and fill’ the earth.

Very Bad

What happened between Genesis 2 and Genesis 4 is what I call the ‘Great Separation.’ God created the heavens and the earth as a demonstration of His ‘glory’ and ‘greatness.’

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Psalm 19:1

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth. Psalm 57:5

Something happened in Genesis 3 that led to the ‘great separation’ between God and humans. That something was a failure to pass the first test. God told Adam, who told his wife, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” How did humans fail such an easy test? God had given them what was probably a very large garden filled with delicious fruit and herbs to eat. All they had to do was ‘not’ eat the fruit from one tree. What happened? The serpent happened –

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. Genesis 3:1

This was God's first test and it was based on His Word. Would the first humans believe God or someone else?

And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" Genesis 3:2

The serpent misquoted God, which is a favorite technique of the enemy. God did not say 'you shall not eat of every tree of the garden.' Instead, God said – "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." That's quite different than what the serpent said. Students of the God's Word need to watch for every slight difference because it is a favorite way of the enemy 'deceiving' people.

At first it looked like Eve might pass the test. She might have started by pointing out to the serpent that he had misquoted God, but she didn't bring that up and also misquoted the Lord –

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ”

Genesis 3:2-3

Eve misquoted God by adding the words ‘nor shall you touch it.’ God did not say that to Adam. God only said ‘you shall not eat.’ He said nothing about ‘touching.’ Maybe that was implied, but God did not say it. Again, listen closely to the enemy's attacks on God's Word. The attacks are often very ‘slight’ deviations from what God says in order to deceive people.

The serpent finished the test by calling God a liar with bad intentions – “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Notice that the serpent presented himself as someone with special knowledge of God’s ‘real’ intent. Again, another favorite technique of ‘deception’ by the enemy.

How did Eve respond to what the serpent said?

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took off its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. Genesis 3:6-7

The 'Great' Separation

That was the beginning of the 'great separation' between humans and their Creator. Things went from 'very good' to 'very bad' in a matter of just a few minutes. The result of the serpent's 'deception' and the humans' 'disobedience' led to curses, sorrow, pain, and death – spiritual and physical –

So the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:14

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you. Genesis 3:16

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return. Genesis 3:17-19

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:22-24

Order to Disorder

What we find from that point on in the Bible, and the history of the world, is ‘disorder.’ God created everything in ‘orderly’ fashion, but it quickly became ‘disorderly’ when humans failed their first ‘test.’ Humans have failed every ‘test’ from God since. That includes every member of Adam’s race.

Adam’s first son failed. Cain’s family failed. Seth’s family failed. God chose Noah to start fresh, but Noah’s family failed. God chose Abram to bless the nations of the world, but the nations of the world failed. The human race is a failure because of the sin of Adam –

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— Romans 5:12

Is it any wonder that God would inspire the Apostle Paul to write –

As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one. Romans 3:10-12

It is only because of God's promise to Eve that her Seed would one day 'destroy' the seed of the serpent that any human has a chance to become anything other than a failure in God's eyes. That's why God sent His Son to 'destroy the works of the devil' (John 3:8). By making Himself 'of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men,' being found in appearance as a man and becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross, God's Son destroyed the 'works' of the devil.

The human race now has a real chance at regaining what it lost in the Garden of Eden –

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Romans 5:18-19

That 'righteous Man' is Jesus Christ, God's Son. All humans were 'made sinners' 'by one man's disobedience.' That's the reality we deal with every day in this world. Everyone is born a sinner because of Adam's sin. However, 'by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.' Not all people, but many people.

Who are those people? The ones who do this –

... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Romans 10:9-13

In answer to a very simple, direct question – “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” – Paul’s answer was also simple and direct – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31). God began the process of bringing ‘re-order’ out of ‘disorder’ in a way that was easy to understand and do. Believe in Jesus – call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved.

However, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I do not believe in 'easy-believeism.' Yes, God made salvation 'easy' in the sense that a person confesses their sin, need for forgiveness, and complete trust (belief) in the death of Christ on the Cross for salvation. However, we must not forget the rest of Scripture. Following Jesus Christ means 'following' Jesus Christ. As He told His disciples, they would be hated, persecuted, and face many tribulations in this world. The apostles preached, taught, and wrote thousands of words that described in great detail the meaning of being a follower of Jesus Christ. It's not 'easy' to follow Jesus.

Many, many people hear the Word of God and keep on walking – “the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” Other people hear the Word and appear to receive it with joy. However, the seed of the Word does not take root, “but endures only for awhile.” They stumble as soon as tribulation or persecution arise in the world. Some people who hear the Gospel don't take it to heart because of “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.” Those 'cares' and 'riches' 'chokes the word' and there is no fruit. There is that minority of people

who hear the Gospel and understand it. They bear fruit. They are saved.

Our job is to spread the Word, preach the Gospel, tell others about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We explain it the best we can. We answer questions and defend the truth the best we can. However, it is God who saves. We don't save. We can't save. Only God saves. As Paul wrote – “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). Yes, we plant and water the seeds of the Gospel, but God gives the increase – He saves.

Dis-Order to Re-Order

So, doesn't salvation mean that the 'dis-order' of our life will become 're-ordered' after becoming a follower of Christ. Yes, but not right away. There is more work to be done. Every true Christian has a job to do – to bring glory to God and finish the work God gave them to do. Your 'work' (ministry) may be different than mine. Maybe you and I share the same work, but in different places in the world. God makes those decisions –

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

No matter what spiritual gift God gives us, no matter where in the world He sends us, all glory is His because He does it all. Yes, there are diversities of gifts, “but the same Spirit.” There are differences of ministries, “but the same Lord.” There are diversities of activities, “but it the same God who works all in all.” All glory to God!

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Galatians 1:3-5

Reunited and Restored

The great ‘secret’ of Christianity is that it is the only way to be **reunited** to God and have the ‘severed relationship’ because of Adam **restored**. As Jesus said – “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). There is no other way ‘back’ to God.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be 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 with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead

indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:5-11

We know by reading the end of the Bible that all of God's people will eventually be reunited with Him forever and ever. That is a great promise and wonderful hope as we deal with persecution, trials, and tribulations in this life. We are all "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). When Jesus does appear, He will unite all of His people with Him to rule and reign forever.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need

no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:1-5

I admit that I was a bit naïve when I left atheism for Christian theism in 1971. I spent months investigating the truth claims of theism, especially those of Christian theism. I became a Christian through the evidence I found that supported belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God come from Heaven to earth to seek and save the lost and destroy the works of the devil.

So, how was I naïve? I thought that all Christians would believe the same things I had learned during my investigation. I was unpleasantly surprised to discover that many Christians didn't get along with each other. I found lots of divisions among Christians, in addition to a great deal of pressure on me as a young Christian to believe and act a certain way to please different groups of Christians. Why was that? Was there anything I or any other Christian could do to bring fellow believers together? Maybe. Let's explore that idea for awhile.

Unity

The idea that fellow followers of Jesus Christ should be unified seemed like a ‘no-brainer’ to me as a young Christian. I loved everything I read in the Bible because I had confirmed the truthfulness of its claims. God wanted His people to be unified in glorifying Him and preaching His Truth. There was no doubt about it, so that’s what I expected to see in the ‘Church.’

Here are some of the verses I read as a young Christian that led me to that ‘conclusion’ –

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! Psalm 133:1

Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. John 17:11

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:20-21

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Philippians 2:1-3

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5-6

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28

Imagine my surprise when I ventured out and met other Christians. I quickly discovered that many of them disagreed with each other and attempted to pull me into their circle so that I would agree with them and/or stand 'against' other believers.

Venturing Out

I use the term ‘venturing out’ because I was invited to speak at various churches and Christian group meetings. I was well known as a much-despised atheist radio talk show host in a large city, so people wanted to check me out when they heard I had become a Christian. I basically just shared my process of coming to faith in Christ through the investigative process. I was too young in Christianity to teach anyone, so I just shared what I knew to be true based on my investigation of the evidence. The one thing I knew was that ‘I once was blind, but now I see.’ God existed, the Bible was a reliable book of antiquity, and Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again. That much I knew.

I didn’t realize at the time that I had stepped into the world of ‘apologetics’ by investigating the evidence. I would later learn that believing and trusting ‘evidence’ as a Christian came with its own set of challenges. More on that later.

It was during those first couple of years as a Christian that I discovered fellow believers were not always ‘unified’ with other believers. They often spoke badly about others because of ‘doctrinal’ differences. Different groups would try to convince me they were right about certain things and that other groups of believers were wrong about those things. Some Christians tried to get me to do things that had little if any support that I could find in the Bible. Some said that if I didn’t believe the way they did, I wasn’t saved. Rather than talk about it, they often just walked away when I started asking questions. That seemed a bit rude, but as I said earlier I was a bit naïve at the time.

One of my mentors recommended that I attend Bible college to get some grounding in how to study God’s Word. Turned out to be a good idea. I learned many things that continue to support my ministry to this day. However, I still had a lot to learn. One of the reasons I decided to write this series is to share my journey toward unity in the faith. If it was important to Jesus and His apostles, it was important to me.

Division

Why were there so many divisions among Christians when Jesus and His apostles clearly taught unity among believers? If it was a matter of dividing about [heretical teaching](#), I get that. The Apostle Paul was pretty direct about that issue –

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. Romans 16:17-18

Notice that Paul addressed people who caused ‘divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which’ the Christians had learned. Paul told Christians to ‘avoid them.’ He said that these divisive people ‘do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.’ He also said they used ‘smooth words and flattering speech’ to ‘deceive the hearts of the simple.’ That sounds like ‘heretics.’

I agree based on the Greek words and grammar that Paul used to write Romans. He chose words carefully, being inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Paul told the Christians in Rome to 'note' (*skopeó* – look at, watch carefully, take heed, consider, beware) people who 'cause' (*poieó* – make, manufacture, construct) 'divisions' (*dichostasia* – standing apart, standing separately, dissension, division, dissension) and 'offenses' (*skandalon* – scandal, trigger of a trap, the means of stumbling, stumbling block or stick, means of entrapment, obstacles) 'contrary to the doctrine which you learned' (*para tēn didachēn hēn hūmeis emathete*).

Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul had not yet visited the Christians in Rome when he wrote his letter to them. However, he knew several people in the church at Rome very well (Romans 16:3-15). They most likely had told Paul about what was going on in the church. They told him that the people had learned correct teaching about Jesus Christ. They also told Paul that there were people in the church who were teaching incorrect doctrine to cause the people to stumble. Why did the 'dividers' do it? Not to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, 'but their own belly.' They used smooth

words and flattering speech to ‘deceive the hearts of the simple.’

All of the words I see in Romans 16:17-20 tell me that most, if not all, of the people who were causing ‘division’ in the church in Rome were heretics. Their desire was not to serve Jesus, but to serve their own selfish desires. They used ‘smooth words’ (*chrēstologias* – kind sounding, plausible speaking speaking in a bad sense) and ‘flattering speech’ (*eulogias* – praise, adulation) in ways that would ‘deceive’ members of the church. How should we treat those kinds of people in churches? Paul wrote – *ekklinete ap’ autōn* – ‘turn away from them, avoid them, exclude them, reject them, have nothing to do with them.’ That’s how you deal with divisive people in churches who teach doctrine contrary to what is clearly presented in Scripture (heretics).

Here's another one of Paul's letters that addresses 'division' within churches –

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. Titus 3:8-11

Keep in mind that I'm starting this toward the end of Paul's letter to Titus, even as I did with Romans 16. I strongly recommend that Christians study each Book in the Bible from beginning to end before making a final interpretation of the entire Writing. If you've done that, you can then proceed to interpret short portions of Scripture with confidence. If anyone questions your interpretation, you can discover what they know about the context. If they know nothing or very little, help them understand the full context of a Writing. That

will often help the person understand that your interpretation of a small portion is within the larger context. If they oppose your teaching because of their unbelief, immaturity, or following after the wrong types of teachers, you can do what Paul told Timothy to do with people like that –

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:23-26

As for Paul's letter to Titus, you can read the full context of the letter in a series titled *Living 'Christian' In This Present World* –

Living 'Christian' In This Present World (Part One)

Living 'Christian' In This Present World (Part Two)

Living 'Christian' In This Present World (Part Three)

The letter to Titus begins with a call to appoint elders in every church on the island of Crete for the purpose of “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). ‘Sound doctrine’ (*didaskalia tē hugiainousē* – teaching that is healthy, sound, pure, uncorrupted) should be the goal of every church leader. Paul's reason for elders doing that was – “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain” (Titus 1:10). Paul

went on to tell Titus about what makes a ‘sound’ church (Chapter Two).

That’s the context of Paul’s letter that helps us understand why he wrote what he did toward the end of the letter. There were then, as there are now, people in every church, every denomination, every Bible college and seminary, who are divisive. In the case of the people living on Crete, these people were engaged in ‘foolish disputes.’ The Greek words are *mōras de zētēseis* (stupid, foolish arguments and debates). Know anyone like that in your church? If you do, Paul wrote that Christians should ‘avoid’ (*periistaso* – turn away from, avoid all contact, shun, reject, have nothing to do with) them. That’s strong language, but it’s how God wants to provide ‘order’ in His Church.

Paul said that people engaged in foolish disputes are ‘warped and sinning, being self-condemned.’ The Greek means they are ‘heretical’ (*hairetikon* – heretical, factious), ‘corrupt’ (*exestraptai* – perverted, turned inside out), ‘doing wrong’ (*hamartanei* – sinning, missing the mark God set), and ‘self-condemned’ (*autokatakritos* – self-judged). These fools actually judge themselves by their beliefs and practices. Elders are responsible to tell people in the church to ‘avoid’ the fools .. reject them, have nothing to do with them.

So, the two uses of the word ‘divisive’ deal with heretical teachers. However, what about other divisions in churches? Are divisions **always** caused by ‘heretics.’ Short answer, not always. However, the results of non-heretical divisions in churches can be almost as catastrophic. Remember, God has commanded His people to bring glory to His name and finish the work He has given us to do. Anything that takes us off that ‘path’ should be an immediate warning to us that something is wrong.

Non-Heretical Divisions

‘Unity’ in the Christian Church is vital. Why? Because that’s what King Jesus wants, and Christians should give Jesus Christ whatever He wants. Christianity is not about getting what we want, no matter what you may have heard from some unscrupulous preachers –

For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. Romans 16:18

It’s important that Christians learn the difference between ‘heretical’ divisions and ‘non-heretical’ divisions within churches, denominations, and Christian colleges and seminaries. One reason is that how we resolve the problem within the framework of God’s direction is an important part of bringing glory to God and finishing the work He’s given us to do.

In the last part of our series we looked at Scripture that told Christians to have nothing to do with heretics who cause divisions within churches, denominations, and Christian schools. Paul boldly told the Christians in Rome to ‘avoid them,’ which is the same as saying ‘reject them, turn your back on them, have nothing to do with them.’

Now let’s look at ‘divisions’ in churches that are caused by our fellow brothers and sisters, rather than heretics. Let’s begin with an example, then some definitions –

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 1 Corinthians 1:10-11

The Greek word Paul used for ‘divisions’ was *schismata*. We get the English word ‘schism’ from it. The Greek word means ‘split, dissension, a rending, a dividing, a division.’ It comes from the word *schizó*, which means ‘cleave, divide asunder, split, to rend.’ That’s not a good thing to have happen in churches when King Jesus wants us to be unified and behave in an orderly fashion as members of His Body.

Paul founded the church in Corinth, so he had every right to dive right into the problem from the start of his letter. The apostle began his letter as he often did with a nice greeting and a few kind words. Then, he stated his ‘theme’ and developed his ‘theme.’ What was it? Come together and do God’s work for His glory!!

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has

chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Let’s go back to verse 10 for a few minutes – “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Paul ‘pleads’ with the ‘brethren.’ This is so serious that Paul uses the phrase – “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That particular phrase is used only one time in the New Testament. That’s how significant this situation was to Paul. Remember that Paul was being inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this letter, so his using that phrase was well within God’s permission to do so.

The word ‘plead’ is *parakaleó* and means “to exhort, call for, beseech, entreat, beg.” That’s a pretty strong thing for an apostle to do. In my opinion, Paul demonstrated great restraint in how he approached this ‘divisional’ issue in the Corinthian church. Take note of that. It demonstrates what Paul would later tell Timothy –

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26

An apostle of Christ had tremendous spiritual power – probably more than we can imagine. They also had great wisdom that came from both the Holy Spirit’s urgings as well as ‘battlefield experience.’

Paul's plea was three-fold –

1. that you all speak the same thing
2. *that* there be no divisions among you
3. *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment

Paul explained, beautifully, how Christians should demonstrate unity in the Body of Christ. Is speaking the 'same thing' always an easy thing to do? Is it easy not to have any 'divisions' among members of a church or denomination? Is it a walk in the park 'to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment?' Short answer, no. It's not easy. What it is, is the Lord's will for members of His Church. Let us never forget that Jesus Christ is building 'His Church,' not ours.

The Corinthian Church

The Christian ‘church’ in the Greek city of Corinth was not unlike many churches today. If you could go back almost two-thousand years and visit the Corinthian church members, you’d find people just like the people you attend church with every week. Some of them saved, some unsaved. Some serious about God’s Word, some not serious about God’s Word. Some selfless, some selfish. Some helping build unity, some sowing division. In other words – church.

According to Acts 18, the Lord spoke to Paul in a ‘night vision, and said – “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth for 18 months and established the first church there. Paul faced a lot of opposition from Jews in Corinth, but he stayed strong in his position for a long time. Paul eventually took leave of Corinth and headed for

Ephesus, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. Paul left them in Ephesus while he traveled to Jerusalem.

While Paul was traveling, a Jew by the name of Apollos came to Ephesus. He was an ‘eloquent’ speaker and knew some things about Jesus, but not everything. Apollos went into the synagogue in Ephesus and spoke boldly about Jesus, “showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.” Aquila and Priscilla heard him, took him aside and “explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

Aquila and Priscilla met the Apostle Paul in Corinth. They were tentmakers, like Paul. Aquila was born in Pontus, which was near the Black Sea (now part of Turkey). Aquila was Jewish and had lived with his wife in Italy. However, they left Italy ‘because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome,’ probably around 49 AD. They traveled to Corinth and became Christians at some point either before or after meeting Paul. What we do know is that because Paul ‘was of the same trade,’ he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them making and selling tents. Paul

‘reasoned’ in the synagogue every Sabbath, ‘and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.’

Imagine that for a moment? Getting to become friends with the Apostle Paul, work with him in an occupation, and hear him ‘reason’ with Jews and Greeks about the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder Aquila and Priscilla were confident in taking Apollos aside and ‘explained to him the way of God more accurately.’

Even as Paul traveled from one city to another preaching the Gospel, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos did the same. Acts 18 and 19 tell us that Apollos ‘desired to cross to Achaia’ (southern part of modern Greece). The ‘brethren’ in Ephesus wrote to the disciples in Achaia exhorting them ‘to receive him.’ Apollos had learned well from Aquila and Priscilla (who had learned from Paul) and ‘greatly helped those who had believed through grace.’ Apollos ‘vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.’

How ‘Divisions’ Begin

Acts 19:1 reads that while Apollos was at Corinth when Paul arrived in Ephesus. The fact that Apollos spent time ministering in Corinth would later lead to a ‘division’ in the Corinthian church. Here’s how Paul explained the division –

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are

one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ ... Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. 1 Corinthians 3:1-11, 21-23

This was not an issue of 'doctrine.' Paul said nothing about 'heretical' teaching. He did say that some in the Corinthian church were behaving *immaturely*. The problem was 'pride' about which person had taught them. Paul led some of them to Christ and taught them when he started the church years earlier. Some came to Christ later, possibly under the ministry of Apollos. That led to something that still plagues the 'Church' to this day – 'celebrity boasting' – "I am of Paul" ... "I *am* of Apollos."

How did Paul address this problem of immature pride among some in the church? Head on – “you are still carnal,” “babes in Christ.” Paul then appealed to the ‘order’ that God had designed for how His children were to behave toward one another and toward Him –

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

ALL of the credit goes to God. Yes, Paul planted. Yes, Apollos watered. They each did what God called them to do. However, it is God ‘who gives the increase.’ When people in churches give credit to other people instead of to God, they are walking close to the edge of ‘heresy.’ Remember what God told Israel from the holy mountain – “You shall have no other gods before Me.” When we start crediting humans for what God does, we are treading on unholy ground. Back up and repent.

Next, Paul appealed to the importance of ‘unity’ within the Church –

Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.

1 Corinthians 3 is an excellent example of how to deal with a ‘non-heretical division’ within a church, denomination, or Christian school. Paul put his ‘apostolic finger’ on the root of the problem that faced the church in Corinth and faces so many churches today. It’s pride, selfishness, envy, jealousy, immaturity, a lack of knowledge of God’s will for His people.

I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.

How 'Divisions' End

These types of 'divisions' are not difficult to bring to an end 'if' church leaders are knowledgeable about and willing to address them biblically. How does that happen? First, church leaders need to know what the Bible teaches on a wide variety of subjects. Paul told Timothy that one of the qualifications of being a bishop (pastor) was being "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). Paul told Titus that an 'elder' in the church should hold "fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

Based on years of hearing and reading pastor's sermons and books, much of it is not 'sound doctrine.' Many of them are not fully qualified to be pastors because they don't know what or how to 'teach the Bible 'rightly divide' the Word of God. They may be nice people who do a lot of other things well, but being 'able to teach' and knowing the Bible well enough to 'exhort and convict those who contradict' is often lacking. That's one of the reasons Christians sometimes don't

know how to address 'divisions' in their churches and denominations or make wrong decisions that end up seriously hurting other Christians. I pray this series helps improve that situation for many churches.

Denominations

Even as an atheist I knew about denominations: Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, etc. What I didn't know was how many denominations existed or why they existed.

I learned more about denominations after becoming a Christian. Many different denominational churches and groups invited me to share my testimony of 'angry atheist to grateful Christian' during the first several years after becoming a Christian. Speaking in churches belonging to so many different 'denominations' gave me a unique opportunity to see many styles of worship, beliefs, and practices. Most of the people I met were friendly and welcoming. However, I also sensed an attitude of 'separation and pride.' Why? [more on that in a few minutes]

I wondered if the word 'denomination' is in the Bible? I couldn't find it, so I asked one of my PhD mentors who taught Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek if the idea of a 'denomination' was hidden somewhere in the original languages. He said there wasn't. I confirmed that after learning how to study the Bible in those languages. The word 'denomination' doesn't exist in the Bible. It seemed contrary to the Lord's call for 'unity' among His people, so why were there so many different denominations?

Followers of Christ

Disciples of Jesus were known in the 1st century AD as followers of ‘the Way’ (Acts 9:2) and later as ‘Christians’ (Acts 11:26). The Apostle Paul also wrote that they were members of the ‘body of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Jesus Christ was the first to use the term ‘church’ (Greek – *ekklēsia*, ‘assembly’) –

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Matthew 18:17

The word ‘church’ was used on the Day of Pentecost to describe people who became members of what God was building through faith in Christ Jesus –

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.
Acts 2:46-47

Saul of Tarsus, who later was known as the Apostle Paul, persecuted ‘the church which was at Jerusalem’ (Acts 8:1). Sometime after Jesus called Saul (Paul) to be an apostle, Paul returned home to Tarsus – “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified” (Acts 9:31). Saul’s persecution of the ‘church’ in Jerusalem actually helped spread the Gospel to other areas, starting new churches. The Holy Spirit would later call Paul to travel the world establishing ‘churches,’ selecting ‘leaders’ for those churches, and teaching the ‘doctrine’ that Jesus wanted Christians to follow (Acts 13 – Acts 28).

Paul and other apostles wrote letters to various ‘church’ leaders and members. Many Christians gathered in the homes of fellow Christians (e.g. Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2) to worship God, study His Word, pray, and fellowship. Paul told church leaders to – “shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Notice that Jesus Christ ‘purchased’ the ‘church’ with the blood He shed on the Cross. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, not us.

Jesus Christ told the Apostle John to write to seven ‘churches’ in Asia –

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. Revelation 1:11

I found no mention of different names (denominations) for churches, just different locations. That's what I found throughout Acts and the apostolic letters – churches made up of Christians living and worshiping in different locations.

Separation and Pride

As I mentioned earlier, I sensed an attitude of ‘separation and pride’ as I spoke to different churches and Christian groups in the years after leaving atheism for Christian theism. Christians met in different buildings, with different signs, different names, different ways of believing and worshiping, and they seemed proud about their differences. Many Christians talked to me about joining their particular ‘denominational’ church. I remember one person telling me that their denomination was the ‘true bride of Christ.’ He said members of other denominations were ‘friends of the bride.’ I didn’t find that in New Testament, and it struck me as being prideful and separative – almost a kind of ‘tribalism.’

I didn't buy into the idea of being 'separated' from other Christians, unless it was for biblical reasons (e.g. heretical teachings, divisions within churches that leaders needed to address, etc). That seemed contrary to God's desire for His people to be 'unified.' I also question the wisdom of having different denominational 'names' for churches. The Latin word *nomina* means 'name.' *Denomination* means 'to name.' The French *denominacioun* has the same idea. Who gave denominations their names? People did. I'm not going to get into whether God gave people the names to use for 'denominations,' because I don't know. Only God does. However, I do like to use the names the Holy Spirit inspired in His Word (e.g. *ekklésia*, *Christianos*).

You can find the reasons for different ‘names’ of churches by studying church history. I know why Christians started ‘denominations,’ but that doesn’t change the fact that believers were ‘separating’ from each other. We’ve already seen the biblical method of [dealing with heretics](#) in the Church, so that explains many of the divisions in the early centuries of Church history. Later separations in the Church were often ‘political, theological, and cultural’ in nature (e.g. ‘Western Schism’ of 1378 to 1417, ‘East-West Schism of 1054,’ ‘Reformation of 1517,’ ‘Protestant Movement of 1529,’ etc).

However, the number of ‘denominations’ continued to grow during the following centuries until there were hundreds of them. Some Christian groups even estimate the current number of denominations today to be in the thousands. Christianity, which has so much potential for unity under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, was becoming less unified.

Is this what God wants? Is this how Christians glorify God and finish the work He gave us to do?

Whatever the true number of denominations, the fact remains that there are many different Christian denominations with different headquarters, different leaders, different beliefs, different styles of worship, etc. So, is that a good thing or a bad thing? Given that many denominations have centuries of history, what can be done about it?

De, Non, or Inter?

The three choices the Church seems to have are to be ‘denominational,’ ‘non-denominational,’ or ‘inter-denominational.’ You know what’s on the theological ‘menu’ with denominations. You don’t know what you’re getting with non-denominational churches, so you have to study their theological beliefs carefully. Some are good – some are not – so be careful. I’m definitely not in favor of ‘inter-denominational’ movements because they want to bring all of the churches together, even those that preach false gospels and promote heretical theology. Some ‘ecumenical’ groups even invite leaders and members of non-Christian religions to participate in their meetings. How is that ‘unifying’ Christians? It isn’t. Though I love the idea of all Christians being unified, the ecumenical movement is not the way to accomplish that objective. It’s just a trick of the ‘enemy’ of the Church.

Not Surprised

None of what's happened during the last two-thousand years of Church history should be a surprise to anyone who knows how to 'rightly divide' the Word of Truth. They would know that false preachers and teachers would attack the Church and pull people away from the true Gospel of Christ. Jesus predicted it. The apostles predicted it. It's no surprise.

So, what should Christians who care about 'unity' do about the situation? Love God and their neighbor. Preach the Gospel. Stand strong. Put on the whole armor of God. Stay vigilant, watch, and be ready. Obey God. Glorify Him and finish the work He's given them to do. We are not going to be able to 'change' the Church, but Jesus can and will –

I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Jesus Christ

Strong Beliefs

Is there any way that the many Christian denominations will put aside their differences and unify under the Lordship of Jesus Christ? I don't think so, at least not voluntarily. Let me explain.

Denominations usually become 'denominations' because of strong beliefs. In fact, beliefs within denominations can be so strong that leaders and members split into yet another 'denomination.' You may have experienced something like that in your lifetime. If so, you know it's a difficult thing to go through for leaders and members on both sides of a disagreement. Why? Because of strong beliefs and feelings.

It's my opinion that denominations are here to stay. They have their headquarters, their leaders, their members, their schools, their church buildings, their publications – why change that if you believe you're right? After centuries of conflict, division, politics, and attempts at control, I don't

think Christians are going to suddenly change, hold hands, and sing 'kumbaya.'

What I Do and Don't Mean

It's easy to be misunderstood in an online publication, so let me explain what I 'don't mean.' I'm not 'anti-denomination' in the sense that I don't think any of the denominations do any good for the Kingdom of God. I know lots of people in many denominations who love God and are committed to bringing glory to His name and finishing the work He gave them to do.

I'm a realist. People who are truly 'saved' and are part of a denomination are part of the worldwide Body of Christ (the Church). Many good works have been done in the name of Jesus Christ through various denominations. However, some pretty bad works have occurred through various denominations as well. If you've been around churches and denominations long enough, you know what I'm addressing.

I am also not talking about supporting any kind of ‘ecumenical’ movement, as if that’s the way to reclaim ‘unity’ in the Church. The World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches are examples of what I mean by ‘ecumenical.’ It’s also known as ‘ecumenism.’ The definition of ‘ecumenical’ includes – “promoting or tending toward worldwide Christian unity or cooperation” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), and “encouraging **the different** Christian Churches **to** unite” (Cambridge Dictionary). ‘Ecumenism,’ which connects with the word ‘ecumenical,’ is a movement toward unity or cooperation of Christian churches on a worldwide scale.

One problem with ‘ecumenical’ and ‘ecumenism’ is that anyone and everyone who identifies as Christian can be part of it – whether they are truly saved or not. That includes heretical groups which are definitely ‘outside the camp.’ The World Council of Churches (WCC) claims that it is ‘a fellowship of 352 member churches who together represent more than half a billion Christians around the world.’ The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has been an ‘ecumenical’ voice since 1950. It claims to have 37

member communions and more than 30 million individuals, with 100-thousand congregations. Quoting from their website – “NCC works with secular and interfaith partners to advance a shared agenda of peace, progress, and positive change.” Does that mean they preach the Gospel of Grace to their ‘secular and interfaith partners?’ Check out their publications and you’ll quickly find the answer – no. The WCC and NCC have no interest in doing what Jesus told the apostles to do or what the apostles told Christians to do in preaching that secularism and heretical beliefs are wrong. The statement of the NCC is that it wants to work with its secular and interfaith partners ‘to advance a shared agenda of peace, progress, and positive change.’

That is not the kind of unity Jesus and His apostles prayed for or promoted. Far from it. I do understand why ecumenical leaders and followers get the simple Gospel of Christ so wrong – “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). The ‘natural man’ is “dead in trespasses and sins .. by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Leaders of ecumenical movements will first have to humble themselves to the Spirit of God, repent of their sins, seek God's forgiveness, and place their full trust and faith in Jesus Christ alone. Once they've done that and spent a little time reading the Bible receiving 'the things of the Spirit of God,' they will leave their ecumenical movement and preach against it. Until that happens, they will continue to deceive and lead people astray.

Who Brings Real Unity?

Jesus Christ brings 'real unity' to the Church that He is building. It's what He prayed for to His Father in Heaven –

Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are ... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:11, 20-23

It was the desire of Christ's apostles that Christians take all the necessary steps to keep unity in their churches –

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

Notice what it takes to experience real ‘unity’ in a church or denomination – ‘walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.’ Who called us? God did. So, how do go about walking ‘worthy’ of His calling?

- with all lowliness and gentleness
- with longsuffering
- bearing with one another in love
- endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

Notice Paul’s emphasis on the ‘why’ of unity?

- *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling
- one Lord
- one faith
- one baptism

- one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all

Jesus Christ is the best Judge about how well any church, any denomination, is doing to ‘keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’

Order Restored

You may remember in the last part of this series that I mentioned I didn't find the word 'denomination' in the Bible. It's not in English, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, or any other language for that matter. Even so, there are hundreds of denominations across the world (maybe more). So, think about this for a minute. If there are no denominations mentioned in Scripture, and Scripture includes information about the Body of Christ living together for ever in Heaven, what's going to happen to denominations in Heaven? The answer is easy –

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in

the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

When Jesus descends from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, all true believers (dead and alive) will be ‘caught up together’ to meet the Lord in the air. Does that mean Baptists will fly up to one side, Methodists to another side, Presbyterians to another side, etc? Nope. We will be caught up ‘together’ to meet the Lord.

So, what about once we all get to Heaven? What happens to denominations then? Does everyone ask angels where to find their particular ‘denominational’ corner of Heaven. No. All denominational affiliations will be left on earth. There will be plenty of unsaved people to keep many denominations going after real believers meet Jesus in the sky. There will be no ‘divisions’ of God’s children in Heaven –

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! Revelation 7:9-10

Every true believer, every member of the Body of Christ, no matter what language they spoke on earth, no matter where they lived on earth, will all stand before the Heavenly throne and before Christ crying out with a loud voice, saying “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” No divisions. No denominations. Everybody has the same title in Heaven – ‘redeemed servant who reigns’ –

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:1-4

Our future as members of the Body of Christ is eternal. The future of denominations? Temporary.

Whether you are in a denomination now or not – whether you think highly of your denomination or not – don't lose sight of what God wants you to do .. bring Him glory and finish the work He has given you to do. Why? Because of our true identity and what's coming next –

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Philippians 3:20-12

Order Restored!

Next eBook

So, what about the many things within Christianity that do cause divisions that are not heretical? How do we deal with those now – in real time? I'll share my thoughts about one of them in the next volume of our special series, *Order in the Court of the King!*

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