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Preface

When you talk to someone about their church, they may or may not know what its doctrinal statement actually consists of. Most likely, what they know comes mainly from what they have seen or heard during their attendance at the church's services. These services may do little to inform a person, however, because there is a trend in churches today to ignore doctrine and emphasize experience. As a result, many people are unaware of what their own church actually stands for, or what their Pastor really believes.

The popular philosophy in Christianity today suggests that doctrine is a bad thing because it builds walls between Christians. Love, on the other hand, is desirable because it brings all kinds of Christians together. Many point to Jesus' words where He said that all men would know we are his disciples if we have love one to another. From this they make love the basis for fellowship and cooperation among those who call themselves Christians, willingly setting aside differences in doctrine in order to get along. Of course, we are supposed to love one another, but real love does not tolerate error. It seeks to correct it. And if a person does not believe the truth, he will never be set free from sin and its consequences, no matter how good he feels about other people.

Many Christians are being convinced that the differences between Denominations consist only of minor issues and that all Christians believe the same gospel and preach the same salvation message, even though they express it differently. This simply is not true. Many of the doctrines taught by the different denominations actually contradict each other and truth that will set a man free cannot possibly contain contradictions. If a church does not teach the truth as God intended it to be, it is guilty of preaching another Jesus, another spirit, and/or another gospel.

Differences in the doctrinal positions of various denominations and churches are significant; and it is important for us to be informed about those differences. They must be carefully compared to Scripture and sorted according to their conformity or lack of conformity to the literal truth of the Word of God. By doing so, we can see what each Denomination really stands for and be able to understand why it is so important to be careful about choosing those with whom we fellowship.

The need for understanding what the denominations believe and how they differ comes from a spirit of tolerance among evangelicals today that used to be manifested only among liberals. Movements such as the Promise Keepers are bringing Fundamentalists together with Charismatics, liberal Protestants, and Catholics in great appearances of unity in spite of the fact that their churches' doctrinal positions are vastly different and often contradictory. At the same time, an emphasis on worship is gradually replacing an emphasis on preaching among evangelicals, fostering a new basis for unity: since we all know that doctrine divides, but we all worship the same Savior, we can be unified through the experience of worship and thereby set aside the non-essential things of theology.

This is the pattern that brought modernism to the mainline denominations. It will eventually bring modernism to evangelical churches as well unless Christians can be convinced that it is a righteous thing to have convictions about what they believe.

These articles about the history and doctrines of the denominations are intended to show that there are good reasons for maintaining the walls that divide them. True unity in the church is a matter of faith, not feeling. The reason Christ gave the gifts of evangelists, pastors, and teachers to the church was to edify the members of Christ, bringing them into a "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God," so that they would not be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." As you read this and other materials on the particulars of various denominations, learn to recognize the many winds of doctrine that have the potential of destabilizing a person's faith if diversity is encouraged as a positive ingredient of fellowship.

It is true that doctrine divides, but the Bible teaches that it is false doctrine that causes this division. Romans 16:17 says, *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* True Bible believers do not divide the church by their loyalty to the truth. However, it is incumbent upon the faithful to maintain the lines of separation thus created. Otherwise, we will lose the means to clarify what the truth really is. The distinctions identified in the following pages should make this abundantly clear.

It is important to note before you proceed through the rest of this document that these pages discuss the official doctrinal position of institutions and not individuals. It is very possible that you know someone who attends a particular church that does not personally believe what that church officially stands for. Do not count them guilty merely by association. At the same time, your friend may be completely unaware of what his or her church actually believes. Perhaps it would be good if they were more informed. Herein lies the purpose of this book: to provide Bible believers with information regarding the doctrinal positions of various denominations.

CHAPTER ONE

IS WHAT I BELIEVE REALLY IMPORTANT?

One of the outcomes of the Reformation was the formal division of the Church. In fact, it seemed that once the precedent of division was set there was no end to the dividing of church people over differences of belief. Today there are a multitude of denominations including at least 27 Baptist denominations, 23 Methodist, 10 Presbyterian, 10 Brethren, 12 Lutheran, 12 Mennonite, 13 Pentecostal, 200 Churches of God, and countless others with a variety of names. (This does not include all the independent churches.) Each denomination has its own doctrinal distinctives.

The trend of division has been assuaged in large degree in this century, however, by the ecumenical movement and the interest in Christian unity. But if it was important enough for these groups to be separated because of their differences, how is it that so many of them can get together today?

The device that is bringing them together is the willingness to ignore differences of belief in favor of finding "common ground." When doctrinal statements are correlated, it is agreed that the points of disagreement simply will not be discussed. Only those areas upon which the cooperating bodies agree will be addressed. This is described as "agreeing on the essentials."

Is this means of securing Christian unity acceptable to God and Biblically correct? Does the essential nature of some doctrines make other doctrines non-essential? Who determines which doctrines are essential and which are non-essential? And, if a doctrine is non-essential, of what value is that portion of the Bible that teaches non-essential doctrines?

Beware the "Doctrine of the Essentials"

God carefully specified that all Scripture is of equal value. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The Divine author did not waste precious space in the Holy Book on non-essential dribble. He said, "*All Scripture...is profitable for doctrine...*" (II Timothy 3:16). I am wondering which part of "all" some people do not understand?

When Jesus was on earth, He clarified that the precise teaching of Scripture down to each jot and tittle was intended to be fulfilled. He even went so far as to say that if any one violated one of these least commandments (jots and tittles) it would effect his standing in the Kingdom (Matthew 5:17-19).

The Scriptures did not come from man (II Peter 1:20-21) and it is certainly not up to man to decide what Scripture is essential and what Scripture is non-essential, especially since God said it is all profitable for doctrine and Jesus confirmed the essential nature of even the smallest parts of the Word. The Bible cautions against the wisdom of man. Man simply cannot be trusted to establish or maintain an infallible standard. Truth is the standard and God alone is the judge of Truth.

One of the dangers of the "Doctrine of the Essentials" is that the interests of man are elevated over the interests of God. The message is that unity, love and getting along with one another is more important than truth. Consider their rationale: all of the Bible is truth, but some of the truth of the Bible is not essential because it interferes with Christian unity. This line of reasoning says that I am wrong if what I believe prevents me from having fellowship with another Christian simply because he does not believe the same thing. This kind of thinking clearly says that the interests of human relationships is more important than at least some of the things God has said.

The problem is that the broader the scope of "fellowship," the more truth becomes non-essential in order to accommodate human relationships. Carried to its furthest extreme in the World Council of Churches, their doctrinal statement has been watered down to one sentence:

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Every true believer confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures. And each one wants to fulfill their calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The problem is not that we do not agree with this much. The problem is all the things that are left out.

Furthermore, once accommodation becomes the rule, there is no end to the process until all conviction is totally eliminated. According to Dr. M. H. Reynolds, "...this 'doctrinal basis' of the WCC is actually meaningless because an official document goes on to explain that 'Since the World Council of Churches is not itself a church it passes no judgement upon the sincerity with which member churches accept the basis.' Document 24, Appendix III, of the WCC Central Committee Meeting of August 22-29, 1973, specifically states: 'The World Council of Churches has no common confession. It is a fellowship of churches confessing Jesus Christ each in its own way.'" They are clearly saying their "fellowship" is more important than what they believe which relegates belief to oblivion.

This is a trend in many Mission Boards and Bible Colleges, also. While they have not gone as far as the World Council of Churches, they are on the same road of eliminating items from their doctrinal statements to accommodate a larger scope of support and clientele. We may be able to agree with everything their doctrinal statement says. It is what it does not say that raises serious questions.

Another danger of the "Doctrine of the Essentials" is the door it opens for false doctrine to infiltrate. When the whole standard of truth is not held high, and only parts of it are considered essential, discernment is greatly effected. Tolerance minimizes the need to discern truth from error. People who have not achieved the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ are thus easily tossed by various winds of doctrine (Ephesians 4:12-14). False teachers come along using the name of Christ and incorporating Biblical vocabulary and "sincere" Christians unwittingly seek common ground with error because they have ignored so called "non-essential" truths that would have protected them. Before they realize what has happened, they are carried away unto another gospel which is not really another gospel but is a perversion of the real gospel (Galatians 1:6-7).

The Whole Counsel of God is Essential

The general term Theology refers to the systematic catalog of all the doctrines taught by Scripture. There are ten major categories of doctrine including the following:

Bibliology -	The Doctrine of the Bible
Theology -	The Doctrine of God
Christology -	The Doctrine of Christ
Pneumatology -	The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
Angelology -	The Doctrine of Angels and Satan
Anthropology -	The Doctrine of Man
Hamartiology -	The Doctrine of Sin
Soteriology -	The Doctrine of Salvation
Ecclesiology -	The Doctrine of the Church
Eschatology -	The Doctrine of Last Things

Under each of these general headings there are many specific things that the Bible teaches. There are things for us to believe concerning:

The Inspiration of Scripture	Creation
The Inerrancy of Scripture	The Roles of Man and Woman
The Canon of Scripture	The Fall of Man
The Attributes of God	The Consequences of Sin
The Decrees of God	Redemption, Propitiation
The Tri-unity of God	Justification, Sanctification
The Divine Nature of Christ	Grace, Faith, Mercy, etc.
The Human Nature of Christ	The Body of Christ
The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit	The Offices of the Church
The Gifts of the Holy Spirit	The Rapture
The Nature and Work of Angels	The Tribulation Period
The Fall and Work of Satan	The Millennium

And this only scratches the surface of all the fascinating things God gave us information about in the Bible. If God said all of this is profitable, then which of us will assume the authority to designate some of these profitable truths as non-essential?

So What Do We Do About Our Different Beliefs?

We must acknowledge that many sincere people equally claiming to be Christians and equally claiming to believe the Bible to be God's Holy, Infallible, Inspired, and Inerrant Word have come to greatly differing conclusions as to what the Bible means by what it says. How do we deal with this?

We must begin with the conviction that the meaning of the Bible is up to God and not up to man. God's Word means an awful lot to Him. He even magnifies it above his name (Psalm 138:2). And, in Psalm 119 He declares that His Word is settled in Heaven, is very pure, is true from the beginning and endures forever. The idea is that the original intent of the Word of God as He gave it is the only meaning it really has. Any given statement in Scripture cannot legitimately mean two different things to two different people. At least one of those interpretations must be wrong.

Then, if two people disagree about the meaning of the Bible, both should examine the basis of their interpretation. The true meaning of Scripture is based upon what it says in the literal sense of the grammar, the historical context in which it is set and the harmony it shares with all other Scripture. Too many people begin with a premise and search the Bible for isolated statements to support their ideas. The best way to understand the Bible is to let the Bible simply say what it says.

Will we resolve all of our differences? Probably not, because of the fallibility of man. Is this a reason not to have confidence in and conviction about our understanding of Scripture? Certainly not! The Bible is very precise and God said we have the mind of Christ that allows us to perceive the things He has prepared for us and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that will guide us into all truth (I Corinthians 2:9-16, John 16:13).

Is what I believe important enough to separate from those who disagree? The answer to this is in the heritage of fundamental, Bible believing churches. Many of these churches have separated from denominations or were established independently because they understood that taking a positive stand for doctrinal integrity was more important than tolerating error. They understood what we must continue to maintain: Unity is based upon agreeing on the truth, not on how we feel about each other. What I believe is the most important thing in my life. 📖

CHAPTER TWO

A SHORT HISTORY OF DOCTRINAL DIVISION IN THE CHURCH

Unity is a wonderful objective for the Church. After all, the whole Church is one body and all its real members are intricately related in Christ.

It is important to discuss, however, what Christian unity is to be based upon. There are two primary schools of thought on this matter: one emphasizes how we feel about each other; the other emphasizes what we believe. The former invites Christians to unite in love regardless of doctrinal viewpoints, while the latter insists that true unity can only be based upon agreement in what we believe.

Denominations exist not because Christians hate each other, but because they cannot agree on the interpretation of the Bible. Church history is filled with denominationalism and the doctrinal division that caused it.

There are those today who would erase denominational lines and fuse together all the components of Christianity. The result they desire would not be an homogeneous Church in which everyone was very much the same; rather, it would be a conglomeration of greatly diverse elements, none of which would believe the same thing, but all of which would feel the same way toward each other.

There happens to be very good reasons denominational lines exist. Until those reasons are resolved, those dividing lines should be kept visible so that a proper focus can be maintained on belief and Biblical interpretation. The history of doctrinal division in the Church supports this premise.

The characteristics of the earliest Churches

In the first Century, many Christians held fast to the truth, but false doctrine became a very early problem. Though there were pockets of stability, the Apostles constantly scrambled to put out the brush fires started by false teachers. Society benefitted greatly by the good works generated by Christianity, but the Church itself became fragmented almost as soon as it was started.

The Church at Pergamos held fast God's name, not denying the faith, but tolerated false doctrine, and allowed its perpetrators to dwell among them.

The Church at Thyatira was a busy church with an abundance of good works, but was indiscreet in choosing its teachers and under the influence of those who perverted truth became sympathetic toward immorality.

The Church at Sardis had only a few members that did not defile themselves with error, forgetting what they had learned and becoming essentially a dead church.

The Church at Laodicea trusted in itself instead of God, adopting a worldly mentality rather than a spiritual one, becoming distasteful even to the God whom they claimed to worship.

The Church at Corinth was enriched in knowledge and was behind no other church in gifts, but it was a confused group, with divided loyalties, and the inability to discipline its own members.

The Churches of Galatia were foolish and insecure churches, listening to the Judaizers, turning back from their faith, and striving to please God through the works of the flesh.

The Church at Thessalonica was an energetic church, receiving the word and practicing what they heard through a strong witness, a work of faith, a labor of love and a patience of hope, though nearly cast off course by a counterfeit letter.

The Church at Smyrna faced blasphemy, suffered tribulation, and was in danger of backing off from its faithfulness because of fear.

Besides this characterization of local churches, there are many Biblical statements which indicate the doctrinal turmoil so many believers faced in those early years.

Acts 20:30: Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Romans 16:17-18: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Galatians 1:6-7: I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Ephesians 4:14: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Colossians 2:8,18: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ....Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

I Timothy 4:1: Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.

II Timothy 4:3-4: For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Titus 1:10-11: For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

It is obvious from all this that doctrinal division was not something which could be overlooked no matter how much love flowed between believers. The integrity of sound doctrine was to be protected at all costs, and doctrinal divisions were to be maintained, because they existed as a result of error. Maintaining the distinctions would facilitate identifying the truth much better than the merging of beliefs through tolerance. "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Corinthians 11:19). "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (I John 2:19).

The Growth and Fragmentation of the Early Church

The early Church grew rapidly. Within the first Century, one of every four people in the eastern half of the Roman Empire was a Christian, one of every twenty in the west. It touched every class and rank of people so that Paul testified there were believers even in Caesar's household. So many people were born again that many pagan temples sat idle, being abandoned for a new faith. About the year 200 A.D. Tertullian said, "*Men proclaim that the state is beset with us. Every age, condition, and rank is coming over to us. We are only of yesterday; but already we fill the world.*"

In the second and third Centuries, the Church became more strict concerning the morality of its members. Believing that all men were tainted with the sin of Adam, a new intensity emerged to combat sin, the world, and the flesh. Christians were taught that Christ could see every thing they did and would soon return to judge them. The Church also reacted strongly against the immorality of society and discarded adultery, divorce, abortion, infanticide, homosexuality, public nudity, the theater and public games, to the point that communion was withheld from those who indulged. Eventually, the taboos of the Church would revolutionize the morals of society at large.

But with its rapid growth and moral aptitude also came doctrinal fragmentation. By the year 187 A.D., there were at least twenty identifiable varieties of Christianity and by the year 300 about 100 varieties. The following are examples of the doctrinal divisions among those who called themselves Christians in the first few centuries.

Mani (216-276) taught that perfection is the possession of pure light. Consequently, God is the ruler of the Kingdom of Light while Satan is the ruler of the Kingdom of Darkness. Satan tricked man who lost part of light and became a material being. Salvation was the liberating of the soul from the body. This is very much like things that modern day Christian Science teaches.

Montanus (c.156) proclaimed the beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit and hailed himself as a paraclete sent by Christ. He called for a return to the simplicity of the primitive church including a revival of the miracles, gifts, and prophetic utterances. Today's charismatic movement points to Montanus as its forerunner.

Marcion differentiated between the Yahweh of the Old Testament, whom he said was a bad deity and the God of the New Testament, a good deity. It was the good New Testament God, he said, that sent His Son Jesus to save us.

The Docetists taught that Christ's body was a phantom and that he had no real human flesh.

The Monarchianists denied the deity of Christ. Among these one personality stands out, Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch. He preached with violent body gestures and asked for applause and the waving of handkerchiefs. Female choirs sang hymns of praise to this preacher.

Sabellius tried to avoid Tritheism by saying there were not three personalities in one God but three manifestations of the same person. In the Old Testament, he said, God manifested Himself as Father, in the New Testament as Son and after the resurrection as the Holy Spirit.

Arius taught that Christ was created by God, was not eternal, nor of the same essence as God. If he were the same essence of God, he said, then there would be more than one God. Arius taught things similar to the beliefs of modern day Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Encratites taught adherents to abstain from meat, wine, and sex.

The Abstinents believed in self mortification and condemned marriage as sin.

The Theodotians taught that Christ was only a man.

The Adoptionists taught that Christ was born a man but achieved divinity through perfection, similar to the teachings of modern day Mormons.

The Monothelites believed that Christ had only one will.

The Modelists believed that Christ had only one nature.

Taking Council

While doctrinal divisions multiplied, the Church of the fourth Century tried to rectify them and restore doctrinal unity. As it obtained freedom from persecution and an official role in the Roman Empire, it began a process of scrutiny through Church Councils to clarify its doctrinal positions. These Councils were held on several levels to sort through all that was being taught and to establish what it held to be the truth. There were seven major "ecumenical" Councils which were intended to cover all of Christendom. The first was the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. presided over by Constantine, the Emperor of Rome. (By Roman law, the Emperor was also the head of the religion of the State. Since Christianity was declared by Constantine to be the State Religion, He was the official Head of the Church.)

It was during this council that Athanasius and Arius debated the deity of Christ. In the beginning, the Arians were very persuasive but ultimately, Constantine decided in favor of Athanasius and all but two bishops present signed the resulting doctrinal Statement as follows:

We believe in one God the Father All-Sovereign, maker of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on the earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge living and dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

And those that say "There was when he was not," and "Before he was begotten he was not," and that "He came into being from what-is-not," of those that allege, that the son of God is "Of another substance or essence" or, "created", or "changeable," or alterable," these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

This set a precedent for the issuing of doctrinal statements which at the beginning were called creeds, but essentially were the same format as statements issued by local churches and Denominations today. The purpose was to clarify exactly what was believed and to distinguish that belief from all others. Some years after the Council of Nicea was adjourned, Arius went to Constantine's palace and nearly persuaded him to change his ruling, but upon leaving the palace, died a violent natural death. This was enough to convince Constantine not to reverse his ruling, but it was not enough to persuade Arius' followers to change their views. It was Arian missionaries that flooded the Gaulic states and converted the Barbarians to a Jehovah's Witness-like version of Christianity. When the Barbarians eventually invaded Rome in the middle of the fifth Century, their Christian sentiments led them to spare the church buildings and negotiate with the Bishop of Rome (giving the Bishop a great deal of leverage over the civil authorities in the Western Empire). But the so called Christian beliefs of the Gauls were very different from those of the Roman Church.

A MAJOR SCHISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF FEUDALISM

As the Roman Empire divided between east and west, Constantinople and Rome, so did the Church. The eastern Church became plagued with theological heresy, Arianism gaining a stronghold, and eastern mysticism bearing a significant influence. The eastern Church also became subordinate to the Byzantine Emperor, just the reverse of the western Church. Theological debate, a strong interest in ritual and a resistance of Roman Bishopric authority, led the eastern church to draw itself further and further away from the west.

Meanwhile, the church in the west emerged as a strong political force as well as a religious one. Gregory the Great (540-604), Bishop in the Church of Rome, established a medieval theology that would set a precedent for the darkening of European history. He believed the Bible to be God's Word but he also believed trained minds were required to interpret it. So under Gregory's guidance, only official church personnel were allowed to interpret the Scriptures.

Gregory also caused ecclesiastical power to emerge superior to the civil government. He made peace with Rome's enemies without consulting the Emperor. He built the power of the Roman Bishopric so that people looked more to it than the government for the help they needed. His successors were not necessarily as strong, but without a viable political leader in the vicinity of Rome, the Roman Bishops would not only dominate the politics of Italy, but also of all Europe for centuries to come.

Gregory preached a religion of terror and made a fearful faith necessary. Little by little Popes like him wore the people down so they became pawns of the Church. As feudalism became a way of life in Europe, many monasteries emerged as feudal fiefdoms in their own rights. The people became uneducated and were totally dependent upon the Church (which also owned the land) for both their physical livelihood and their spiritual direction.

What had been the protector of sound doctrine in the first four centuries, became a hotbed for heresy. Corrupt men served as the Bishops of Rome and earthly fathers of the Church. Doctrines were changed to suit the whims of naughty men; and for a very long time, the ordinary people who lived under the hierarchy of a religious monstrosity, had no idea they were being deceived by false teachers.

In spite of this, God always preserved a remnant unto Himself. Groups such as the Waldensians (founded by Waldo in the Twelfth Century) remained separate from the established Church and pursued the Scriptures on their own. Without many records through the dark ages of European history, little is known about many of the true believers that lived in those times. But we can be confident that the true Church never ceased to exist and sound doctrine was always believed by someone.

Reformation

In the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, some common men began to think for themselves in what would become known as the Age of Reason. The effect of this in the traditional Church was a return to the study of the Bible and a growing interest in the original languages, as opposed to the Latin Version officially sanctioned by Rome.

By the Sixteenth Century, this process had so affected men of faith that a great schism occurred, many breaking from the Roman Church and creating new Church bodies. Unfortunately, not all who broke from Rome agreed with each other; so that from the outset of the Reformation, the seeds for several denominations of Christianity were sown. Shades of differences between men like Martin Luther and John Calvin laid the groundwork for their followers to remain separate rather than to form one strong Church in opposition to that which had been corrupted.

The rest is history, as they say. Originally there were four, or five, primary divisions among those who broke from Rome. Lutheranism was founded upon consubstantiation, grace through baptism and high liturgy. Presbyterianism (Calvinism or the Reformed Church) was built upon symbolic communion, irresistible grace and a plain and simple form of worship. Mennonitism (Anabaptists) was established upon the belief that adults should be baptized after their salvation and those who were baptized as infants in the Roman Church needed to be re-baptized upon their profession of faith in Christ. Anglicanism (Episcopalianism being the American equivalent) separated from Rome because of a King's desire to divorce and remarry which was not allowed by Rome. These four groups called themselves Protestants because they protested against traditional church beliefs. A fifth group, less organized at the beginning, called themselves separatists. These folks did not look to the Roman Catholic Church as a place of origin, but considered themselves a completely separate, new beginning of true Christianity.

From each of these groups emerged a multitude of other denominations and independent groups. From Lutheranism came a variety of Lutheran denominations and some Evangelical Free Churches. From Presbyterianism came a variety of Reformed Denominations and the Churches of Christ. From the Mennonites came the Amish and some Brethren groups. From Anglicanism came Methodism and the entire holiness movement including Pentecostalism. From the Separatists came the Baptists and many independent Churches. Each denominational division occurred because of doctrinal differences that made each new group distinct from all others.

Conclusion

Denominational divisions remain today, but the reasons for those divisions are being lost in the confusion of the ecumenical movement. This is because doctrine has become unpopular and is being replaced with experientialism, or relationism. God does desire unity for His Church, but not a touchy-feely kind of unity. Instead, He desires one that is based upon agreement in what Christians believe. His Word is full of admonitions to be of the same mind and to think the same things. Consider, for example, Romans 12:16; Romans 15:5; II Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:10; Philippians 2:2, 3:15, 3:16, 4:2. Scripture also stresses the importance of sound doctrine:

Romans 6:17: But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

I Timothy 1:3: As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine.

I Timothy 4:6: If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

I Timothy 6:1: Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

Titus 1:9: Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

II John 1:9: Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

Denominational lines of division should be maintained until Christians can unify in doctrinal beliefs. Without these divisions, truth will become muddled in the contaminated waters of tolerance and many people will be led astray by thinking that how they feel is more important than what they believe. Maintaining these lines will provide a motivation to compare one set of beliefs with another in pursuit of the interpretation that rightly divides the word of truth.

Only a diligent pursuit of the truth can ultimately produce a substantive unity in the Body of Christ. The prophet Amos asked an immensely valid question: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). The nuance of the word agreed suggests that the two who would walk together must begin at the same place.

This ought to be our goal in the Church. To find that starting place of doctrinal belief so that in all other aspects of the Christian experience we can walk together in harmony. Only then will our love be dynamic and our joy be full. Only then will our lives be pleasing unto the Lord and our unity acceptable in His sight. 

CHAPTER THREE

CATHOLICISM

On March 29, 1994, a group of Evangelical Protestants offered the Roman Catholic Church a document in which they pledged brotherhood in Christ and cooperation in the work of Christ. In it they proclaimed:

We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ....All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ....

Through this lengthy [25 pages] and conciliatory gesture to Catholics, some Evangelical Christians sought to erase centuries of conflict between the two groups. For a number of years, people in the Evangelical community have been talking about saved Catholics and have been cooperating with Catholic people in various social crusades. The Charismatic community has gone even further, building a bridge into the Catholic community and sharing many spiritual activities as well.

If Catholicism offers salvation to mankind in the same way as Evangelical Protestantism (only a little differently), then what was the point of the Reformation? In the Sixteenth Century there was a great schism in the Roman Catholic Church, culminating from generations of persecution and execution of those who resisted the teachings of the Church. The result was the Protestant movement in which new churches were formed with doctrinal beliefs which dramatically contradicted those of Catholicism.

Was it all for nought? Was it a big mistake due to unfortunate misunderstandings? Or are there really significant differences between the teachings of the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches?

In evaluating the Doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, one very important principle must be kept in mind. One cannot understand Catholicism by talking to individual members of the Catholic Church. What any given member of the Church believes and what the Church officially teaches may be two very different things. So whatever an individual Catholic may happen to believe cannot be taken as an affirmation of actual Catholic Doctrine.

Another important factor is that Catholic Doctrine is so complex many of its tenants appear at times to contradict each other. It has the potential for causing confusion.

Many consider Catholicism to be the original form of Christianity and Protestantism simply a derivative. Catholicism, however, is not what Christ intended His Church to be. It is rather a profound departure from the original form of the Church.

The History of the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church evolved around two concepts. One is that the entire Church makes up the Body of Christ and is inseparably linked together. Thus the use of the word "catholic" which means "universal." The other is that the entire Church falls under the jurisdiction of a human being who represents Christ on earth. Thus the use of the word "Pope" for the person who fills that role.

The Roman Catholic Church identifies its beginning in the appointment of Peter as the first Pope. The first Vatican Council stated, "If anyone says that Christ the Lord did not constitute the Blessed Peter prince of all the Apostles and head of the whole church militant; or if he says that this primacy is one of mere honor and not of real jurisdiction received directly and immediately from our Lord Jesus, let him be anathema." The claim is that Christ himself appointed Peter to exercise jurisdiction over the whole Church and instructed him to appoint successors who would do the same throughout all generations. In addition, Peter is said to have fulfilled this jurisdiction from the Church in Rome as have all his successors.

Statements from Church leaders in the early centuries do not support this contention, however.

Ambrose of Milan (397 A.D.) He says the primacy of Peter is only a "primacy of confession, not of honor; of faith, not of rank," and places the apostle Paul on an equality with Peter.

Augustine (430 A.D.) "For the rock is not so named from Peter, but Peter from the rock, even as Christ is not so called after the Christian, but the Christian after Christ. For the reason why the Lord says, 'On this rock I will build my church' is that Peter had said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' On this rock, which thou hast confessed says he, I will build my church. For Christ was the rock upon which also Peter himself was built; for other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid which is Jesus Christ."

Eastern Bishops understood the primacy of Peter in the first place “simply as honorary... to whom that power was but first committed, which the Lord afterward conferred on all the apostles alike; and in the second place, they by no means favor an exclusive transfer of the prerogative to the bishop of Rome, but claim it also for the bishops of Antioch, where Peter, according to Galatians 2 sojourned a long time, and where, according to tradition, he was bishop, and appointed a successor.”

In truth, the development of the office of Pope required much time and struggle. It was not automatically recognized from the time of Peter, and in some parts of Christianity, never was acknowledged. In the early centuries, prominent Bishops existed in such cities as Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth, Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch as well as Rome. And in the fourth and fifth centuries, an irreparable division occurred between the churches in the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire.

Apostolic succession was indeed an issue of the infant Church and earlier Roman Bishops did argue for their direct association with Peter. Not all agreed, however, and the true office of the papacy did not exist for many centuries in that no one exercised jurisdiction beyond the scope of their own local church, including the Bishops in Rome.

Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome from 440 to 461 A.D. was the first to successfully exercise papal authority beyond the borders of Italy, but certainly not over all Christendom. It is important to note, however that his authority was assumed and not given. He was a capable theologian and politician and as such was able by his own assertion to increase the influence and jurisdiction of the Roman Bishop's seat. After Leo, mediocre men sat in the office of the “Pope” for a century and a half and little expansion of influence was affected by them.

While Leo called himself Pope and aspired to the authority of a universal Bishop of the Church, Gregory is better called the first real “Pope.” He refused the title, but exercised jurisdiction over a wide geographical area. He was rivaled by the Patriarch of Constantinople and was only able to achieve a stalemate in preventing him or anyone else besides the Bishop of Rome from claiming the role of universal Bishop.

Gregory was a man of strong character, deep conviction, and capable administrative ability. He was also the beneficiary of a weakened political structure in the European arena. The western version of the Roman Empire had ceased to exist in 476, and Gaulic power had fragmented by the time Gregory became Bishop in Rome.

As a result, he was able not only to solidify the religious power of the papacy but the civil power as well, causing serious reverberation for a thousand years of European history. West of Constantinople and covering all of Europe but still falling short of universal jurisdiction, Roman Catholicism became Church and Government to the people. Popes crowned Kings, Monasteries became feudal fiefdoms and the individual lived every day of his life just as the Church said he should for fear of excommunication if he did otherwise.

What the Church had become in Roman Catholicism was far beyond what God intended it to be. God did indeed desire unity for the entire Body of Christ, but He intended it to be a spiritual unity, based upon a mutual submission to the indwelling Holy Spirit and not to a human being. Beyond the jurisdiction of the Apostles, which was eliminated with the death of those founders of the Church, the only scope of responsibility indicated by Scripture is in the context of the local church and not beyond. History records that this is precisely how things were in the early part of the Church's existence. In spite of this, the Roman Catholic Church has written its own version of history and continues to this day in its insistence that the Pope governs the Church on earth as a substitute for Christ and that his jurisdiction is universal.

The Doctrine of the Catholic Church

The Doctrine of the Catholic Church is a complex maze. Because it is not based solely on the Word of God, but also on the evolution of man's imaginations, it is extremely difficult to confine to a few short pages. The following doctrines, however, are of primary importance to the definition of Roman Catholicism in distinction from Evangelical Christianity.

Tradition And Scripture

Catholic Doctrine teaches that the Bible nowhere implies it is the only source of faith. Thus, it claims that tradition is equal to Scripture. Scripture, according to Catholicism is a tool of the Church. While a gift from God, it is nevertheless in the power of the Church to use Scripture in any way she sees fit. The Church maintains the sole privilege of declaring what the Scriptures mean and how they may be used.

The Catholic Church says that Tradition consists of the teachings of Christ and His Apostles which are not contained in Scripture. It goes far beyond these sources, however, and consists largely of decrees by Church Councils and supposed infallible statements by the Popes. Traditions are considered to be equal in value to Scripture because they are believed to be a source of Divine revelation just as Scripture is.

As a result of this belief, Catholic Doctrine need not be proved from Scripture. As long as documentation for a belief can be found in the Traditions of the Church, Catholicism considers it to be valid.

Sin and Grace

1. Catholic Doctrine teaches that sin is a problem, but not a simple one. In fact, compensating for sin consumes much of what Catholicism consists. It divides sin into two categories.

a. **Original sin** is one of the consequences inherited from Adam and Eve. Original sin sounds like a term which relates to the Protestant belief in the depravity of man. However, the Catholic belief says that while original sin deprives a person of seeing God and of sanctifying grace, it does not send anyone to Hell. In fact, because of its inherited nature and the absence of personal consent, original sin has little or no effect upon the human nature. In spite of inheriting the sin of Adam, human nature remains essentially good and able to do good.

b. **Personal sin** is much more serious than original sin. This kind of sin consists of the specific sins a person commits and has the potential to send a person directly to Hell. There are two kinds of personal sin, venial and mortal. Venial sins are not serious. They consist of things like stealing a small item or telling a little white lie. They are easily compensated for in the course of a person's religious experience. Mortal sins, however, cut a person off from God and from the grace that can save his soul. Whereas original sin merely causes the loss of sanctifying grace, personal mortal sins condemn the perpetrator to Hell. Knowing which sins are venial and which are mortal is sometimes difficult, though, because the determination is often left to the subjectivity of individual priests. A Catholic can never take anything for granted, therefore, and must confess all sin to be sure.

2. Catholic Doctrine teaches that grace is the solution for sin; but just as there are several kinds of sin, there are several sources for obtaining grace to overcome sin.

a. Original sin is the easiest to resolve. It is to this category of sin, and this category alone, that the redemptive work of Christ is applied in Catholic Doctrine. Christ's death and shed blood redeems man from original sin only, not from personal sin. However, even this redemption is hollow, because Catholicism emphatically asserts that faith alone in the work of Christ on the cross will not save anyone, even from the meager penalty of original sin. It is actually man's submission to baptism that saves a person. In fact, in Catholicism baptism is a more powerful force than the redemptive work of Christ, because baptism can save a person from personal sin, as well as original sin. Baptism (pouring water on the forehead in the shape of the cross) provides the grace to eliminate the penalty for original sin. Through baptism, the redemptive work of Christ is communicated to the individual who is restored to the sanctifying grace of God and all personal sins are forgiven, venial and mortal, so that if a person dies immediately after being baptized he will go directly to heaven. This is effective as long as the baptized person never commits another sin. Each personal sin committed after baptism causes a loss of grace. The individual is then responsible for retrieving that lost grace on his own.

b. Grace to compensate for personal sin must be obtained through a variety of means, all of which consist of things man must do for himself. Venial sins (the little ones) are somewhat inconsequential since they do not damage a person's standing before God. They may be compensated for through the general course of obtaining grace through the sacraments. Mortal sins (the big ones that can send a person to Hell) are the real problem. If mortal sin is not properly compensated for, a person goes directly to Hell upon death. The Catholic Church has provided its adherents with many ways to obtain the grace needed to compensate for the personal sins they have committed.

1. The process begins with confession. At least once each year, a Catholic is obligated to confess to an authorized priest all the specific sins he can remember committing since his last confession. This is so essential because if a person dies having committed any unconfessed mortal sins, he goes directly to Hell and there is no hope for him. The priest has the power to absolve confessed sins. The absolution is insufficient, however, because the sinner is then obligated to do something himself to obtain the needed grace to compensate for his personal sins, either while he lives on earth or after he dies. The distinction is that the Priest forgives the sins, but the sinner must bear punishment for his sins, even though they are forgiven.

2. Penance is the activity, imposed by the authorized Priest, which the Catholic sinner may perform in order to obtain the grace which will compensate for his sin. It is supposed to be a visible form of repentance, showing that the sinner is sorry for his sin and wants to do better. Catholic doctrine teaches, however, that penance is actually a means of obtaining forgiveness and grace to live a better life. Penance, then, serves as the punishment an individual must bear for his own confessed and forgiven sin. It generally consists of a specified number of prayers but may also include alms or some other specific work. Penance is crucial because if enough penance is not performed for mortal sins, there will be consequences to pay after a person dies, even though all mortal sins were confessed and forgiven.

3. Other means of obtaining grace include Confirmation (by which a person receives the Holy Spirit), The Holy Eucharist (Communion), Extreme Unction (anointing the sick), Holy Orders (such as the offices of Bishop, Priest, etc.) and Matrimony (marriage). Along with Baptism and Penance, these are called sacraments. A sacrament is something man can do to obtain the grace of God. Catholicism teaches that grace is conferred through all seven sacraments and that this grace is absolutely necessary for salvation. Faith alone in the work of Christ is not enough. If a sufficient amount of grace is not obtained to compensate for sins committed, venial or mortal, the remaining penalty for personal sins will have to be worked off after a person dies.

4. If man fails to obtain all the grace he needs before he dies, Catholic Doctrine teaches that he must work off the rest of his punishment by suffering in Purgatory. The length of time a person spends in Purgatory varies according to the amount of punishment that has not been erased by the earning of grace. The Doctrine of Purgatory corresponds to the teaching that God's forgiveness does not eliminate the need for punishment. If a living person does not sufficiently punish himself through penance, then he must complete his punishment by suffering in Purgatory after he dies.

5. Indulgences is another way to obtain grace. Essentially, an indulgence is the release from punishment for sin in exchange for the payment of money to the Catholic Church. They are careful to say that the payment of money does not forgive sin, it only reduces the punishment for sin, continuing the distinction between these two things. Indulgences may be purchased for yourself while you are living or for dead loved ones in Purgatory. This is possible because of what is called the Treasury of the Church. Both the merits of Christ which exceeded what was needed for saving man from original sin and the merits of Mary and the Saints which exceeded their own needs were deposited into this treasury from which the church may draw to grant indulgences to those who can pay money for them.

6. The veneration of Mary and the Saints is yet another means by which they hope to obtain favor with God. Catholicism teaches that by virtue of their achieving residency in Heaven, the Saints have the privilege of obtaining the audience of God and interceding for man. In doing so, Mary and the Saints may actually obtain divine grace for others.

Salvation and the Sacrifice of Christ

Catholic Doctrine teaches that Christ's one sacrifice was not sufficient to pay for all sin. In the Mass, Christ is offered as a sacrifice over and over again.

The Holy Eucharist is the term the Catholic Church uses for Communion. It teaches that when the Priest, acting as Christ, says the words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood," the bread and wine actually turn into the real body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Technically, Catholicism insists that the Eucharist is only an extension of the suffering of Christ on the Cross into the present. But the effect of each Mass is to offer Christ again and again in sacrifice to God.

The proof of this is that Catholics receive Christ into their lives, not by faith in what He did for them on the Cross, but by physically swallowing the actual body of Christ in the bread of communion. It is also proven in that it is not sufficient for them to receive Christ once, even through this physical manifestation, but He must be received as many times as possible in the hope that enough grace will be obtained to avoid all punishment for the sins that were supposedly forgiven when they were confessed to the Priest.

Rebuttal

Scripture is the sole source of God's Word to man. By the end of the First Century, it was complete and all other means of communicating God's Revelation to mankind were done away with (I Corinthians 13:8-9; Colossians 1:25; II Timothy 3:16; Revelation 22:18-19). Tradition is emphatically denounced by Scripture as having any credibility in establishing true doctrine or directing the lives of God's people (Matthew 15:3-6; Colossians 2:8; I Peter 1:18).

In inheriting sin from Adam, every human being not only lost the ability to see God, but obtained a depraved human nature and was condemned to Hell (Romans 5:12; John 3:18-20; Romans 3:10-19).

Every person is born with a sin nature and there is no innate goodness in man (Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:11-12). One sin, regardless of its degree of seriousness, makes a man a sinner and lost (James 2:10).

The grace needed for salvation can be obtained only through faith in what Jesus Christ did for us. Jesus Christ paid for all sin, whether original or personal, whether venial or mortal, and He paid all that was required for sin. He left nothing undone in redeeming mankind, and God makes no distinction between guilt and punishment. Jesus bore all of it for all of us on the cross. It is left only for man to believe in Jesus Christ and to trust that what He did for us was enough (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; I John 2:2; Hebrews 9:14-15; Romans 10:9-13).

The Evangelical Christians who seek harmony with Catholics say that "we affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith." Catholic doctrine agrees with this statement so far as it goes. Catholicism does teach that a person is saved by grace, but by grace the individual may obtain through a variety of means. Catholicism also teaches that a person is saved through faith in Christ -- but emphatically denies that a person can be saved through faith in Christ alone.

Many ask whether a person may be genuinely saved by faith in Christ alone and remain in the Catholic Church. The answer is simple. A person cannot be genuinely saved and continue to believe Catholic Doctrine because Catholic Doctrine categorically contradicts the truth of Scripture. And if you do not believe Catholic Doctrine, why would you want to remain in the Catholic Church. Christ clearly teaches His followers to mark them who do not follow the truth and have no fellowship with them. 📖

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CHAPTER FOUR

LUTHERANISM

The History of the Lutheran Church

Lutheranism is inseparably linked to the man Martin Luther. While there were many others involved in the Reformation, Luther was the real catalyst for the severance of the Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. And, his particular teachings led to the formation of Lutheran Churches.

In 1505, at the age of 22, Martin Luther feared for his life in the midst of a raging summer storm. He promised Saint Anne that he would become a monk if he were spared. In 1507, he was ordained and celebrated his first Mass.

There were two things Luther would struggle with as a Catholic priest. One was the unrest of his own soul. The other was the abuses practiced by the Church hierarchy. He dealt with his troubled soul unhappily through ascetic abuses of his own body until 1511 when he discovered in Scripture the wonderful truth of justification by faith alone. Gloriously saved, he began teaching Scriptural truth and protesting against the unbiblical excesses of the Pope and his cronies. On October 31, 1517, Luther posted Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg outlining his objections to the sale of indulgences and other abuses. By 1520, he was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. He survived because the German Princes saw a means through Luther to break from Rome, not only religiously, but politically as well. Others joined in Luther's protest and the Reformation became an unstoppable movement of change that would forever alter the complexion of Christianity.

Actually, Martin Luther never wanted a Church to be named after him. In his own words, *"I beg that my name may be passed over in silence, and that men will call themselves not Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? My teaching is not mine....How does it happen that I...have the children of Christ called after my unholy name? Not so, dear friends! Let us root out party names and call ourselves Christians, for it is Christ's gospel we have."* Martin Luther, 1521

However, the label, first imposed by his enemies, was soon adopted by his followers and used as the title for the churches they organized. Lutheranism spread throughout Europe during the Sixteenth Century and into America in the early Seventeenth Century. Various Lutheran organizations were formed through the years so that at one point there were 150 Lutheran groups in the United States alone. Today, through mergers, there are only about twelve separate Lutheran organizations in the U.S.A., and six of them claim 95% of all American Lutherans. Most Lutheran Churches belong to the World Council of Churches.

The Doctrinal Beliefs of the Lutheran Church

In spite of the separate organizations that exist among Lutherans, there is for the most part a unity among them as to their beliefs. This is because they generally agree on the source for their doctrine. This includes documents written primarily by Martin Luther himself, but also a few documents written by others. They include:

- The Large and Small Catechisms, written in 1529 by Martin Luther,
- The Augsburg Confession, written in 1530 by Philip Melanchthon,
- The Smalcald Articles of Faith, written in 1537 by Luther and Melanchthon
- The Formula of Concord, written in 1577 by second generation Lutherans but based on Luther's ideology and theology.

These documents are the foundation for what Lutherans believe today and it is from these documents that we can understand real Lutheran doctrine. It is important to note that Lutheran doctrine is based on these documents and not on the personal beliefs of any particular member of a Lutheran Church.

The theology of Lutheranism is much simpler than that of Catholicism and consists of some very basic tenets. Luther taught that justification came through faith alone and not through ceremony. He taught that the individual conscience was responsible directly to God. And, he taught that the Bible was the real source of truth, not pope or tradition.

However, even though Luther left the Catholic Church, he never really intended to go that far away from historic Catholicism. It was not all Catholic doctrine which he opposed, only its excesses and abuses. Others wanted to go much further and radically change the doctrine of the Church. They would eventually begin separate groups that provided the roots for other Christian denominations.

The result is that Lutheranism does differ from fundamental doctrine believed by Bible believing Christians today. While some Lutheran theology sounds like what we believe, the difference can be seen in the details.

1. Justification By Faith

Luther's statement on Redemption sounds nearly identical to the words we would use today in a Bible Church. *"I believe that Jesus Christ, true son of God, has become my Lord...that he has redeemed from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. Before this I had no Lord and King but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness....(H)e became man, conceived and born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, that he might become Lord over sin, moreover, he suffered, died, and was buried that he might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owed, not with silver and gold but with his own precious blood....Afterward he rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed dominion at the right hand of the Father."*

The Catholic Church had come to believe that original sin contained no guilt and condemned no one to hell. There was an innate goodness in man and man could overcome his own failures by his own good works. Christ simply released us from the legal connection to the errors of Adam and Eve.

Luther and Melancthon disagreed and saw original sin as the real culprit. Original sin, they said, was the reason every man was guilty before God and it denied each person any fear or trust in God and the ability to produce such things from within himself.

If man could be good entirely on his own, Christ was unnecessary. Melancthon mused, *"What need is there for the grace of Christ if we can become righteous by our own righteousness?"*

Martin Luther and his followers recognized the necessity for a radical solution to sin and that Jesus Christ alone provided that solution. The cornerstone of Luther's theology was the belief in justification by faith apart from works; that is, faith in the redemptive work of Christ, that rescued man from both the condemnation of original sin and the guilt that comes from the practice of sin. Justification was not a work performed in a man's life, but a pronouncement made by God upon a man's life who had come in faith to Jesus Christ.

2. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Luther's statement on Justification is clear and sound, but other parts of his theology seem to contradict his claim of faith in Christ alone. Regarding baptism, he wrote in his Large Catechism, *"Moreover, it is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we shall not be saved....To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save....To be saved, we know is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever."*

Luther, perhaps unwittingly, encouraged people to place their faith in Christ only indirectly and taught that baptism was the tangible object of man's faith. Water, in Luther's mind, was merely a thing the maid cooked with, unless it was combined with the Word of God. He believed that when the Word of God was combined with physical water, the water became a divine substance with the power to regenerate. It became the visible agent by which the Word of God was applied to the person made wet with the water of Baptism.

To Luther, placing faith in the divine water of baptism was the same as placing faith in God. He may very well have believed that His own faith was solely directed to God, but by what he taught, he led his followers to believe that their faith was channeled to God through the physical substance of water. Luther felt it was necessary to provide something tangible for people to see and feel, thinking that an invisible faith would not work in the human soul. He wrote, *"Faith must have something to believe -- something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be Baptism in which there is sheer salvation and life...."*

Granted, he did not suggest that water alone was a saving agent. He said it must be combined with the Word of God to offer efficacy (something with truly divine power to produce supernatural effects). But it is clear that Martin Luther taught and that Lutherans believe today that baptism is the agent by which salvation is transferred from God to man.

In teaching that children could be saved through the ceremony of baptism, he gave further implication to his followers that the water of Baptism was efficacious in and of itself. *"We are not primarily concerned whether the baptized person believes or not, for in the latter case Baptism does not become invalid....Baptism is valid even though faith be lacking....Even if infants did not believe...still their Baptism would be valid and no one should rebaptize them."* Gerhard added, *"To infants Baptism is, primarily, the ordinary means of regeneration and purification from sin;...secondarily, it is the seal of righteousness and the confirmation of faith."* In other words, children who are baptized are saved even though they are unable to exercise personal faith in Christ, merely because they have experienced the ceremony because the ceremony is efficacious.

Luther side stepped the objection that he was teaching salvation through works by defining baptism, not as a work of man, but as a work of God. Because he believed the Word of God was the active agent working through the physical substance of water, he was able to rationalize that man's participation was not the element that produced salvation. Rather, he convinced himself that God's participation in baptism was

the element that produced salvation for man. This theological technicality, however, seems to be lost in the thinking of the average Lutheran who believes he was saved when he was baptized. The Lutheran's confidence is primarily in the ceremony for without the ceremony, there is no salvation.

To those who said that baptism was merely an external matter having nothing to do with the salvation of the soul, Luther responded, *"Now, these people are so foolish as to separate faith from the object to which faith is attached and bound on the ground that the object is something external. Yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart...."*

3. The Sacrament of the Altar

Luther rejected the Catholic teaching that there were seven sacraments, saying there were only two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, he viewed these two ceremonies as sacraments and not as ordinances. Just as he believed that Baptism was the agent of salvation, he believed that the Lord's Supper was the agent of grace for the forgiveness of sins.

Concerning the Lord's Supper he wrote, *"Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of the Lord Christ in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by Christ's word to eat and drink. As we said of Baptism that it is not mere water, so we say here that the sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread or wine such as is served at the table. It is bread and wine comprehended in God's Word and connected with it."*

Just as Baptism was an object of faith to Luther, so was the bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper. Baptism he believed was the agent of the new birth, but the elements of the Lord's Supper were the agents of cleansing from the sins a person commits on a daily basis. He said, *"We go to the sacrament because we receive there a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins.... The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself...."*

Again, Luther insisted that the literal components of bread and wine had no efficacy of their own, but in combination with the Word of God, became the agents by which the Word was communicated to the heart of man. In objection to those who suggested that the bread and wine were merely symbolic, Luther wrote, *"Therefore it is absurd to say that Christ's body and blood are not given and poured out for us in the Lord's Supper and hence that we cannot have forgiveness of sins in the sacrament. Although the work was accomplished and forgiveness of sins was acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word."* And to Luther, the Word was imparted to man through the tangible elements of the sacraments.

The Catholic Church taught Transubstantiation: the belief that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper changed substance and became the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Luther changed this to Consubstantiation: the belief that the bread and wine maintained their literal substance but that Christ was spiritually present in the physical elements. This is a very small distinction. Both believed that if one were to eat the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper believing that Christ was present, the benefit of forgiveness of sins would be applied to the recipient's life. In fact, Luther believed this so firmly that he taught if one were to abstain from the Lord's Supper he was not to be considered a Christian.

4. Confession and Absolution

The Catholic Church had enslaved its adherents through the requirement that everyone confess every specific sin to a priest on a regular basis or face the prospect of going to hell. Luther rightly rejected this and condemned it in strong terms.

He did not go far enough, though, for he still believed it was necessary for a man to confess his sin to another man and receive forgiveness by the mouth of a man. He said, *"Confession consists of two parts. The first is my work and act, when I lament my sin and desire comfort and restoration for my soul. The second is a work which God does, when he absolves me of my sins through the word placed in the mouth of a man."*

He taught that the sins which needed to be confessed, consisted only of those things about which a person was aware and troubled. This might include such things as unfaithful service to an employer, quarreling, grumbling with one's wife, failing to properly train one's children, cursing, using immodest language, speaking evil of a neighbor, or cheating someone in a business deal.

The confession was to be made to one's Pastor, whereupon, he would respond,

"God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith. Amen. Do you believe that this forgiveness is the forgiveness of God? Be it done for you as you have believed. According to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace."

Even though a Lutheran might believe the forgiveness he receives is from God, they nevertheless receive it through a human mediator and the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ Himself.

Conclusion

Luther believed the Gospel. He understood that man was a sinner and that he was utterly helpless in restoring his fellowship with God. He understood that man was condemned to hell and lost forever. He understood that Jesus Christ shed His blood for the sin of man and that in doing so, he paid all that needed to be paid to secure the salvation of mankind.

Martin Luther gave God all the credit for the work of salvation. Man could not do good works and obtain favor with God. He must be justified solely on the basis of his faith in the work of Christ done on his behalf. In Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Confession, it is not the work of man that saves, but the work of God. This was an important distinction to Luther and he was very emphatic in his explanation of these matters, that apart from faith in Christ and the application of the Word of God, Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Confession were meaningless.

But he also believed that God communicated salvation and the forgiveness of sins to man through the physical elements of these activities -- through water, bread and wine, and the mouth of a man. In spite of the distinction he understood in his own mind, it has been greatly lost by those who follow his teachings today.

Lutheranism essentially teaches baptismal regeneration, the impartation of the grace of God through the elements of the Lord's Supper, and the forgiveness of sins through a human intermediary.

The difference between Lutheran doctrine and that of fundamental Bible believers is not in the definition of the Gospel, but in the means by which the Gospel is applied to the life. Already in Luther's day there were those who believed that Baptism was merely an outward testimony of the salvation that had already taken place in the life. There were those who believed that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper were merely symbolic and offered no efficacy to man, but served only as a means by which we remember what Christ did for us. There were those who believed that man need only confess directly to God and not go through a human intermediary. Yet, Luther consciously rejected each of these view points and argued against them in his own writings.

The result is that Lutherans tend to respond to the Gospel differently than members of a Bible Church do. Both respond with faith. But Lutherans respond with faith in the physical elements of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Confession, while Bible believers respond with faith in Christ -- alone! 📖

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CHAPTER FIVE

PRESBYTERIANISM AND THE REFORMED CHURCHES

The History of the Reformed Churches

In the beginning of the Reformation, those who objected to the errors of Roman Catholicism did not want to leave the Church but wished to reform it from within. When they eventually did leave, the label “Reformers” stuck to some and thus began the roots of several Protestant Denominations. These include groups that use either the label Reformed or Presbyterian as well as some others. The distinction is primarily due to the names used during the Reformation to refer to the participants of the Reformed movement in different places around Europe. They were called *Reformed* in Switzerland, Holland and Germany, *Presbyterian* in England and Scotland, *Huguenot* in France, and by *National names* in Bohemia and Hungary. The term Reformed speaks primarily of the theology of these Churches while the term Presbyterianism speaks more of their organizational structure. There are many Reformed and Presbyterian Church Organizations in the world today, but all are Calvinistic, follow a Reformed catechism and use a Presbyterian form of government.

The real father of the Reformed Churches was Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) of Zurich Switzerland. Though he was a contemporary of Martin Luther, there was not a lot of cooperation between them. In fact, in 1529 they parted ways permanently. Zwingli had met with Luther that year to seek a conciliation on various matters, but they were unable to agree on one particular issue. Luther taught that Christ was present in the elements of the Lord’s table while Zwingli insisted the bread and wine were mere symbols or memorials to the actual body and blood of Christ. As a result of their disagreement, Lutheran and Reformed Churches were set on totally separate paths.

Zwingli died while serving as a chaplain during a military engagement in 1531, leaving the door open for John Calvin to assume the leadership of the Reformed movement. Calvin was a young Frenchman who had studied for the Priesthood and then for the Law; but he was converted in 1534 and joined the Protestant movement. At age twenty-seven he published the first draft of his Institutes, a systematization of Reformed Theology, and due to pressure from the Catholic hierarchy moved to Switzerland. He meant only to pass through Geneva, but William Farel, who had started a Protestant work there, persuaded him to stay and help. Except for a brief period of time, he would spend the rest of his life in this city.

Eventually, John Calvin became the organizer of both a form of government and a theology that would lay the foundation for all the Reformed Churches. In Geneva he established a representative form of government for the church which consisted of five pastors and twelve elders. He believed the elders should be elected freely by the people, but had difficulty fully implementing the idea because of the City Council which alternately loved and loathed the man. Placing authority in the hands of a group of elected men was a radical idea for his day. The Catholic Church was run by the Episcopal concept of appointed Bishops and hierarchical control. Calvin’s influence in this regard not only changed the way Churches were governed but brought about changes in the governments of nations as well. His proposed form of church government became known as Presbyterianism and for this reason some of the Reformed Churches adopted this as their title.

Calvin’s writings were prolific, and it was said of him that he wrote more than a person can read. They are scholarly and profound, as well, and reveal a great depth of thought. Besides his Institutes which he expanded many times, he wrote confessions of faith and catechisms (upon which the Heidelberg Catechism is based), and he corresponded extensively with other reformers throughout Europe.

As a result of Calvin’s influence Reformed Theology is much more complex than that of Lutheranism. Luther believed in keeping things simple. He encouraged his Pastors to settle on an exact wording for their catechism and always teach exactly the same words, never changing them. He believed this facilitated learning on the part of the parishioners who were mostly illiterate. Calvin, on the other hand, was a deep thinker and constantly expanded his own writings concerning the intricacies of theology. His Institutes eventually became a huge volume that takes a very long time to appreciate.

Reformed Theology.

1. The Sovereignty of God.

Of all the tenets of Calvin’s Reformed Theology, the Sovereignty of God is by far the most dominant. For many centuries before him, man had been made the focus of what the Church believed. Man was basically good; man could solve his own spiritual problems; and grace was a work God did in man to resolved the divine conflict. Calvin saw it as just the opposite.

He turned men's eyes toward heaven to see a God who is absolutely in control in contrast to man who is absolutely depraved and totally helpless. In fact, man, to Calvin, was in such bad shape that he was incapable even of exercising faith without a special endowment from God. God, on the other hand, is sovereign over the universe, sovereign over the provision of salvation, sovereign over the individual conscience, and sovereign over the faith and conduct of men.

Every element of Calvin's theology reflected this emphasis on the sovereignty of God. In teaching the **Total Depravity of Man**, he insisted that man could never choose any thing good for himself, not even belief in the simple Gospel of Christ: rather, God had to impose faith upon man or he could never possess it. With the concept of **Unconditional Election**, he insisted that God selected those who would be saved and designated all the rest of humanity to go to hell, completely without regard to the will and interest of the human beings involved. In the belief of the **Limited Atonement**, Calvin taught that the work of Christ was applied only to those whom God had selected to be saved. Through **Irresistible Grace**, he said the elect could not resist God's selection of them for salvation nor could they resist the application of the work of Christ upon their lives. And, in the **Preservation of the Saints**, Calvin proclaimed that man, who has no choice in being saved, equally has no choice about remaining saved and is kept for all eternity by the power of God alone.

2. Predestination and Salvation.

Hence, predestination became a cornerstone to the Reformed view of the human experience. According to their Confession of Faith, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." Accordingly, everything that happens to man is predetermined by God, including his salvation or lack of it.

Calvin believed that man's salvation had absolutely nothing to do with his own will. At great length, he argued that some men are predestined by God to be saved and others are predestined to be destroyed. He said emphatically, "*God by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others.*" Hence, two men may hear the same Gospel sermon, and both understand exactly what is being said, but one will be saved because God works "effectually" in him to cause him to believe and the other will remain lost because God does not work "effectually" in him. The desire to be saved does not come from a convicted human heart, but as an irresistibly bestowed gift from God. If you are not part of the elect, access to salvation is denied and you can never be saved.

3. The Visible and Invisible Church.

From the influence of Augustine, Church theologians had given up on the distinction between Israel and the Church. Many of the Reformers, Calvin included, carried this belief with them into their new doctrinal statements. In Calvin's words, "*I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God -- the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are the sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world.*"

This viewpoint came to be known later as Covenant Theology. It teaches that Adam and Eve lived under a Covenant of Works, being required to obey certain rules in the Garden of Eden. Because they failed and broke the Covenant of Works, God removed them from the Garden and instituted a new Covenant of Grace. This Covenant of Grace extends throughout the remainder of human history and includes all the faithful in one spiritual body. There is no distinction between Israel and the Church in Covenant Theology because the Church is viewed merely as a continuation of the Nation of Israel. All the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are applied to the Church in the New Testament. Israel will never be reinstated as the people of God, because the Church is Israel.

Calvin did, however, make a distinction between the visible and invisible Church. The invisible Church, he said, was the true Church consisting of all the elect throughout the course of human history. The visible Church, on the other hand, was the earthly organization that consisted of both saved and unsaved individuals. Just as they were not all Israel which were of Israel (Romans 9:6), so they are not all the Church which are of the Church. So in the Reformed view, salvation is not a requirement for Church membership, because it is not possible for men to judge whether people are saved or not. Only God knows for sure who are the elect.

4. Baptism

In a great departure from centuries of teaching, and in a departure even from Lutheran theology, Calvin taught that baptism did not produce salvation. He said it was symbolic and only anticipated what God would do.

Neither did he agree, however, with the Anabaptists who taught that baptism was only for adults after their conversion to Christ. Instead, he believed that baptism carried on the spirit of circumcision in the same way the Church carried on for Israel. It was based not on the profession of what God had done, but on the promises of what God would do. This is the reason that Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of today baptize infants, believing they are following the long standing tradition initiated with Abraham in Genesis.

Calvin's idea was that by baptizing infants the promises of God enjoyed by their parents were applied to them until they became mature enough to reject the promises on their own. Thus Calvin said, *"Wherefore, both the children of the Jews, because, when made heirs of that covenant, they were separated from the heathen, were called a holy seed, and for the same reason the children of Christians, or those who have only one believing parent, are called holy, and, by the testimony of the apostle, differ from the impure seed of idolaters."* While Reformed Theology does not teach that baptizing an infant is a life time guarantee of a person's salvation, it does suggest that it protects children of believers against the consequences of depravity, which is not true of unbaptized infants and children of the non-elect.

5. The Lord's Supper.

Regarding the Lord's supper, Luther had changed the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation (the literal physical presence of Christ in the elements) to consubstantiation (the real spiritual presence of Christ in the elements). Zwingli was much more radical, saying that Christ was not present at all, but the elements of bread and wine were merely inducements to remember what Christ had done for us so long ago. Calvin compromised between Luther and Zwingli, saying that the elements were symbolic, but that the faith of those who received them somehow brought the real presence of Christ into the experience.

6. The Future.

Since there is no distinction in Reformed Theology between Israel and the Church and since the Church experiences the fulfillment of all the promises given to the Jewish people, there is no need for the revival of a Nation to receive the promises of God. Consequently, there is no Millennial Kingdom to look forward to, there is no Tribulation period to prepare Israel for, and there is no Rapture to remove the Church from the earth.

The future for those of this persuasion consists of very few events. They believe Apostasy will become wide spread and Antichrist will appear. Jesus will then come from Heaven, and in one sweeping movement judge the Antichrist, resurrect dead believers and rescue the living. At this time, the wicked dead will be raised and judged, the earth will be burned up and a new heaven and a new earth will be created in which only righteousness dwells.

7. The Scriptures.

They arrive at these conclusions because they interpret much of the Scriptures allegorically and not literally. In the early Church there were those, such as Origen, who taught this approach to Scripture. It is continued today by many people including those who subscribe to Reformed Theology.

Those who read the Bible as an allegory say there is a spiritual meaning behind the literal words, so that the literal words do not mean what they say, they mean something else. Hence, Israel does not refer strictly to a nation, but is a synonym for the Church, both terms referring to all believers of all time. Millennium does not mean a thousand years but speaks of the Kingdom of God into which we have already entered. And, the first resurrection does not mean there is more than one literal resurrection, but refers to the regeneration of the individual.

Rebuttal

Typically, those who call themselves Presbyterian believe in Reformed Theology. It is possible that someone would consider himself to be a Presbyterian purely on the basis of the form of Government used in his Church, or because he happens to enjoy the company of a particular local Presbyterian congregation. But in the true sense of the term, Presbyterianism embodies Reformed Theology.

Reformed theology differs from Fundamentalism in several vital points. First, and foremost, the Fundamentalist believes in the consistent literal interpretation of Scripture. Most Presbyterians would interpret the Bible literally in passages that discuss historical events and the Gospel of Christ. But when it comes to promises and prophecy, they switch gears to the allegorical method of interpretation. This approach is very subjective, however, when deciding which verses are literal and which verses are not. The Fundamentalist removes all human subjectivity from Scripture and believes every word of the Bible in its literal, historical, and grammatical context.

As a result of a literal approach to Scripture, Israel and the Church are understood to be two separate entities with two distinct programs, both of which are yet to be fulfilled in the future. The Church will be raptured from the earth and Israel will enjoy the literal fulfillment of an eternal Kingdom on earth. To prepare Israel for their Kingdom, there will be a seven year period of tribulation on the earth, after which the Church will return with Christ and rule and reign with Him over the nations in a literal thousand year time period. At the end of this thousand years, Satan will be finally dealt with and the unsaved of all time judged. There are, therefore, different resurrections. There will be a resurrection of Church saints, a resurrection of Old Testament saints and a resurrection of the unsaved, each taking place at a different time.

In addition, fundamental Bible Believers see no incongruity between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. By giving man a personal choice to believe or reject the Gospel, God has in no way relinquished His sovereignty. The election of men by God is not based on the necessity of God deciding everything, but on his foreknowledge of what men would decide to do with the Gospel. The unsaved do not go to hell because God assigned them to that fate, but because they personally rejected the Gospel.

Also, Baptism is purely a symbol of something that has already happened in a person's life and not an anticipation of what will happen. The Lord's supper is purely symbolic and commemorative and there is no mystical presence of Christ in the ceremony. Neither of these things offer any sacramental value to the participants.

Unlike some other Christian Denominations, there are several things in which Fundamentalists and Presbyterians may find themselves in agreement. They would agree on the Inspiration of Scripture and on the belief that it alone is the rule of faith and practice. Theology for both is God centered and not man centered. Both believe that salvation is strictly by faith, though the Reformed believes faith must be given by God, and the Fundamentalist believes it is the response of the human heart to the truth. They both believe in the universal priesthood of believers; and, they both believe in the unconditional and eternal security of the believer.

In spite of these similar beliefs, the differences are serious. Interpreting some Scripture as allegory, leads to an arbitrary theology that can change with each individual's "spiritual" understanding of words. Distinguishing between the visible and invisible church becomes a means for rationalizing ecumenical activity in social action and otherwise. Believing that God randomly selects some to be saved and others to go to Hell raises serious questions about the justice of God and compromises His integrity; and, it has the potential of discouraging evangelistic activity, since the fate of all men is already decided anyway.

Ecclesiastical fellowship between Fundamentalist and Reformed Churches is unwise. They may try to tolerate the differences between them, but in the process will confuse their members. Personal fellowship between a member of a Bible Church and a member of a Presbyterian Church may sound loving and reasonable, but may be difficult. Fellowship is sharing things in common, which means fellowship between two such individuals will constantly run into road blocks because their differences are very real. 📖

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CHAPTER SIX

THE ANABAPTISTS

Their History

Infant baptism had become such a significant part of the theology of the Church that most of the reformers found a way to preserve it in the new thinking of Christian people. Luther taught that there was a dormant faith in the heart of each child, making them worthy of baptism. Calvin taught that infant baptism replaced the Old Testament circumcision and served as the sign of the Covenant of God, thus preserving the souls of children until they could choose for themselves.

In the Netherlands, a radical new teaching emerged concerning the baptizing of infants and concerning the significance of baptism regardless of the age a person received it. The idea was that baptism had nothing to do with a person's salvation whatsoever. It was merely an outward testimony of a person's identity with Jesus Christ and was to be experienced only after saving faith had brought a person into the Body of Christ.

As a result, people who had been baptized into the Catholic Church as infants began to be re-baptized as adults, having first become born again Christians. One such individual, Sikke Frerichs, a tailor by trade, was baptized at Embden in East Friesland on December 10, 1530. Three months later on March 20, 1531, he was beheaded for being re-baptized.

This event came to the ears of a man named Menno Simons. Menno was a priest, but a very devout man who was to become more concerned about truth than ceremony. The martyrdom of Sikke Frerichs awakened him to an investigation of Scripture that would prompt him to lead one of the biggest changes in theology affected by the entire reformation movement. He searched Scripture and found nothing in it about infant baptism. But he did find many wonderful truths he was able to teach many people, laying a foundation for the segment of the Church that would be called the Mennonites.

For a while, Menno was greatly influenced by the writings of Luther. Luther encouraged his followers to continue with Catholic ceremony until the civil authorities of the country where they lived gave legal approval to change. Menno eventually gave up on this because of his conviction that obedience to the Bible even with consequences was better than compromise for the sake of personal safety. Mr. Simons was not the first to develop the doctrinal beliefs that would make up Mennonite theology. A man named Obbe Philips preceded Menno and actually baptized him. But Mr. Philips later became a spiritual disappointment and dropped from the scene. In Switzerland, Conrad Grebel taught many things similar to Dutch Mennonite theology. He did very little writing, however. Menno Simons provides us with a more detailed insight into the historic beliefs and practices of the Mennonites than any of the other early Anabaptists.

All the Mennonites endured great persecution for their radical practice of re-baptizing adults, as well as other teachings. For example, they insisted on the separation of church and state and the rejection of participation in the military. The suffering continued for many generations, at least until they began immigrating to America in the late 17th century.

One significant schism among the Mennonites occurred in 1693 when Jacob Ammann formed a conservative split off of the Swiss group. He rejected the use of such modern conveniences as buttons, as too much conformity to the world; and, he insisted on the practice of shunning against those who had violated the standards or beliefs of the church. This was the beginning of the Amish community.

Today, there are many different Mennonite groups, but all of them hold certain distinctives in common. They possess an evangelical and conservative respect for the Word of God. They emphasize a benevolent love for their fellow man. They are passivists who oppose service in the military. They refuse to take oaths of any kind, and so oppose membership in secret orders. They practice believers' baptism. And, they believe in an aggressive separation from the world. This last item, however, is the matter which divides them. It is not the principle of separation upon which they disagree, but the specific applications of the principle.

Their Doctrine

1. The Bible

While the authority of Scripture was at the heart of Reformation doctrine, no one proclaimed it more succinctly than Menno Simons. The Church for a very long time had considered the writings of men to be equal to the Scripture in determining the beliefs of Christianity. Menno, however, emphatically denied this saying, *"This holy Christian church has only one doctrine -- the pure, unmixed and unadulterated Word of God, the Gospel of grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. All teachings and decrees that do not accord with the doctrine of Christ, be they the teachings and opinions of doctors, decrees of popes, ecumenical councils, or anything else, are but the teachings and commandments of men (Matthew 19:5), doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1), and therefore accursed (Galatians 6:8)."*

He defended the integrity of the Bible and insisted on it being the exclusive source for all doctrinal belief. It was the very Word of God, he said, and would be fulfilled to the very letter of each word. It was the sole basis for our understanding of the salvation God provided to mankind. And, a Christian should do nothing unless it was specifically commanded by Scripture. He said, *"Nothing that is pleasing to God can be instituted or practiced by us without the command of the Holy Scriptures."*

2. The Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

When writing about God, Menno was very colorful. He would often string together a long list of adjectives to emphasize the magnificence of our wonderful God. For example, *"This only, eternal, omnipotent, ineffable, invisible, inexpressible and indescribable God we believe and confess with the Scriptures to be the eternal, incomprehensible Father, with His eternal, incomprehensible Son, and with His eternal, incomprehensible Holy Spirit."*

Luther seemed to take God for granted and focused on the justification of a man's soul. Calvin turned his emphasis more on God but seemed obsessed with His Sovereignty. Simons, on the other hand, was in awe of the whole nature of God.

Menno spoke adoringly of each person of the Trinity and spelled out his beliefs concerning each of them. God the Father was incomprehensible and needed many words to describe His complex nature. God the Son was both Divine and Human - truly God, but in a mysterious way He had become truly man. God the Holy Spirit was equally Divine and enjoyed a multi-faceted ministry with mankind.

If Menno was fascinated with any one member of the Trinity more than the others, it was the Son, Jesus Christ. He detailed the Scriptural evidence that He was truly God, with all the attributes of God as part of His own nature. He described Christ as, *"this same eternal, wise, almighty, holy, true, living and incomprehensible Word...who in the beginning was with God and was God."* In addition, he confirmed Christ's incarnation by the virgin birth, His human nature, yet without sin, His work of redemption as totally exclusive from the works of man, and His office of comforter to the contrite heart.

3. Sin

Sin was a single large problem and not a complex division of original and personal sins. Original sin is the mother and nature of sin that dwells within the human. Actual sins were merely the fruits of the nature of sin. The two were inseparable and needed to be dealt with in one solution so that inherent sin would lose its strength and actual sins could be forgiven.

There was, however, one deadly sin for Menno Simons which haunts the Mennonites even to this day. Christ had said that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was unforgivable, and Simons believed this to be true before and after a person had been saved. It was possible, he believed for a person who committed this sin *"after his confession and baptism,"* to lose the ability to repent and to be condemned to *"continue in his perverseness and wantonly despise Christ and His Word to the end."* The only way a person could know that he had not committed this mortal sin was by his ability to repent and renew a demonstration of the fruits of repentance in his life. As long as he did this, he was assured that his salvation was intact. But when this terrible sin was committed, he would never again repent and he would be lost.

Otherwise, all sin was dealt with in exactly the same way. *"All sins,"* he said, *"both inward and outward, have their reconciliation in the merits and the power of the blood of the Lord, if truly repented of, according to the Scriptures."*

4. Salvation

All Bible believers may thank Mr. Simons for his insistence that there is no solution for sin other than the person and work of Jesus Christ. He wrote, "

They all seek some remedy for their sins, but the only true remedy, Christ, they do not recognize; they have therefore contrived so many remedies that we can neither describe nor relate them all, such as the Romish indulgences, holy water, fastings, confessions, masses, pilgrimages, infant baptism, bread and wine, etc. My dear reader, the truth we testify to you in Christ; you may believe, do hope and seek where and what you choose, we are assured that you will in eternity find no other remedy for your sins which will avail before God, than...Jesus Christ. All those, therefore, that seek other remedies for their sins, however great and holy they may appear, than the remedy provided by God alone, deny the Lord's death, which He suffered for us, and His innocent blood which He shed for us."

"We point therefore alone to Jesus Christ who is our only and eternal righteousness, reconciliation and propitiation with the Father, and know of no trust in our own works....All those, now who with believing hearts accept and receive this means of divine grace, Christ Jesus, and believe and confess that through His sacrifice, death and blood their sins are forgiven, that His wrath will nevermore be upon them, that they will not be lost, that He accepts them as His beloved sons and daughters and gives them eternal life; all such are of a peaceable and joyous spirit and give thanks to God with renewed hearts; for the power of the Spirit quickens and changes them into newness of life, and they walk thus by the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit in the power of the new birth, according to the measure of their faith, in obedience to their God who has shown them so great love."

More than any other early reformer, Menno Simons divorced religion from Christianity and restored its heart and soul - a simple relationship with God through faith alone in His Son Jesus Christ, and the work He did on our behalf. He talked about being born again and the effect this had on the way a person lived. Christianity was not sustained by the ceremony conducted in a building, but by a totally transformed lifestyle that reflected the fruits of repentance and faith.

To be sure, repentance was a key ingredient for Mr. Simons in securing salvation from God. Once a person realized that he was a sinner and that Christ was the only solution for sin, it was absolutely necessary for him to repent. This was not merely an expression of sorrow, but an active turning from sin. One does not get the impression from the things Menno said that he believed this turning from sin was in any way efficacious. It was, to him, rather a tangible evidence that a man's faith was real. Unfortunately, many Mennonite and Amish folks today miss this vital point and have difficulty in separating their own repentance from that which provides propitiation before God.

Faith was equally significant in the heart of Mr. Simons. Faith, he said, *"fully realizes that God can not break His promise, but must keep it, because He is the truth and cannot lie....The righteousness which avail and ever will avail before God, consists not in ceremonies and works, but in a true, fruitful faith and nothing else."* He also insisted that the genuineness of faith must be verified by the fruits that follow in man's life. *"For the faith which is born of the Word of God can not be without fruits, except in those who grieve the Holy Ghost."*

5. The Christian Life

Out of his belief that repentance and a fruitful faith were necessary to salvation grew a conviction concerning the lifestyle of those who were saved. He said a *"true evangelical faith is of such nature that it can not be workless or idle.... True believers show in act and deed that they believe, are born of God and spiritually minded."*

This lifestyle consisted of at least three major ingredients. First was a devotion to God that went far beyond ceremony and religious rites. Second was a commitment to serve and aid other human beings in their needs. Third was a personal adornment that avoided serving the interests of the flesh.

This was so thoroughly taught and handed down through the generations that these three things mark the lives of the faithful Mennonites even today. It is evident in their speech and personal devotion that God is the supreme priority of their lives. They are devoted to His Word and to the praise of His Name. It is evident from their benevolent work that they are concerned for their fellow man. When a flood or earthquake damages property and disrupts the lives of fellow Americans, be they Mennonites or anyone else, Mennonite relief groups quickly move in to action to help these people. It is also evident by the dress and habits of their lives that maintaining purity in their outward lives is as important to them as maintaining the integrity of their hearts before God. To these folks of simple faith, Christianity is everything and effects every part of their lives, without exception.

6. The Ordinances

Menno Simons taught that there are three ordinances: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Washing the Saints Feet. His beliefs about these things were a significant departure even from the beliefs of other reformers.

a. Baptism. Baptism to Mr. Simons was exclusively a testimony of something that had already taken place in a believer's life and nothing else. If it preceded faith it was useless. By following faith it merely proclaimed that faith had been exercised and added nothing to it. To baptize infants was ridiculous because they were incapable of faith. Baptism was to be administered only to those who were of sufficient age to understand the Gospel of Christ and to receive it for themselves. He and

his followers were called Anabaptists because they re-baptized persons who having been baptized in the Catholic Church as infants had come to real faith in Christ as adults.

Even though he believed baptism offered no consolation to children, he did not believe children were lost. Describing what is called today the age of accountability, he assured parents that their children were saved as long as they were too young to understand the difference between right and wrong.

b. The Lord's Supper. The Lord's supper was equally symbolic and served only as a memorial to what Christ had done for mankind. There was no presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine, real or imagined. And, communion also provided a symbolic illustration of the unity of believers who were members one of another in the Body of the Lord Jesus.

c. Washing the Saints Feet. Taking the words of Christ literally, Menno believed Jesus wanted his followers to do more than serve one another in humility. He wanted us to physically wash each others feet in a show of that humility and attitude of service. This was new and different from all the other reformers, but came from Simon's great desire to meticulously follow the words of God.

7. Miscellaneous items

Menno Simons insisted that for the Church to survive it needed a strict system of discipline. He attributed the errors of the historic Catholic Church to its failure to police itself and punish those who deviated from the truth. He instructed his followers to actively help restore fallen brothers and sisters and to exclude from fellowship those who refused to repent.

He insisted on a high standard of qualifications for those who would serve as teachers and shepherds; and he rejected the idea of a stipulated annual salary. They should have provided by the people only *"that which they could not obtain themselves."*

Charity was to be an important part of their lives. They were to *"distribute to the necessity of the saints, receive the miserable, take the stranger into their houses, console the afflicted, assist the needy, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, not turn their face from the poor, and not despise their own suffering members."*

Material possessions were dangerous. They shall tended to make men proud and so they were encouraged to learn how to deny themselves rather than indulge. Along with this, personal adornment was to be plain and humble. Jewelry and fine clothing were not in keeping with the adornment of the Spirit.

"The regenerated do not go to war nor fight." It was incompatible with a life of love and concern for one's fellow man to kill him in battle and loot his possessions. A Christian cannot rightly on the one hand *"love his enemies, do good to those who do them evil, and pray for those who abuse and persecute them,"* and on the other hand, *"retaliate, rebel, war, murder, slay, torture, steal, rob and burn cities and conquer countries."*

Just so, it was wrong to administer capital punishment. If a criminal repented of sin and became a Christian, a believer could not justly put a fellow Christian to death. Neither could a believer justly execute a non-Christian lest he cut short his opportunity to repent and believe.

There is an important distinction between the Church and the State. As such, the state authorities have no right to punish a man for his faith or intervene in the affairs of the Body of Christ. However, Christians are to have the utmost respect for civil authority and government as it is ordained by God to maintain order in society.

Rebuttal

It is difficult for a Bible believer to find much fault in the things which Menno Simons believed and wrote. He enunciated the Gospel clearly and correctly and dynamically moved Christianity back in the direction of truth. There are a few matters, however, with which today's Bible believers will disagree.

Mr. Simons believed it was possible for a Christian to lose his salvation. It does not appear that he believed this to be a common occurrence nor that he believed a person could easily slip back and forth from being saved to lost and saved again. But he did teach that if a Christian committed the unpardonable sin, he would lose his ability to repent and remain in such a state to the end.

Holy Scripture is very emphatic about the security of a believer in Jesus Christ. *"We are,"* it says, *"kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation"* (I Peter 1:5). Once a believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30), no one is able to pluck him out of the Father's hand (John 10:28). Eternal life lasts forever and is totally unconditional.

To be fair, The Mennonite Confession of Faith adopted by the Mennonite General Conference, August 22, 1963, does speak of the assurance of a believer's salvation and of the keeping power of God. Assurance and security may mean two different things, however. Menno believed a person was assured of salvation as

long as his life bore the fruits of faith and repentance. If these fruits ceased because of unforgivable sin, his assurance was lost as well.

In addition, Menno's strong emphasis on repentance may be misleading to some. Repentance surely is essential to a contrite heart which catches the attention of God. And, the repentance that leads to faith also leads to a respect for the righteousness of God which has a definite effect on the lifestyle of a believer. One must be careful, however, not to think that his own turning from sin has any efficacious power and that repentance itself adds anything to his standing before God. It is faith in the redemptive work of Christ alone that brings salvation to a man's heart. Repentance merely brings his heart to a willingness to believe.

There is something that many Christians should learn from the Mennonites -- the practical application of righteousness in the daily life of a believer. They take very seriously both their own separation from the world and a benevolent concern for their fellow man. One may rightly wonder if all the Mennonites are able to make a distinction between the good works that are the fruits of salvation and trusting in good works to secure salvation. If they follow the teachings of Menno Simons, they should be able to. We hope for them that their faith is properly placed.📖

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CHAPTER SEVEN

ANGLICANISM AND THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Anglican Church is the State Church of England. It became so by the Act of Supremacy issued by Henry VIII in 1534, which “repudiated papal supremacy and declared the King to be the supreme head of the Church of England.”

The Episcopal Church is the American version of the Anglican Church. It is autonomous from the Church of England, but is bound together with it in history, tradition, and doctrinal beliefs.

These Churches seek to bring together elements of Catholicism and Protestantism in one Christian Denomination. In the inception of this branch of Christianity, Catholic Anglicans were satisfied that the Old Faith was preserved intact, while Protestant Anglicans were pleased with the breach with Rome. Today it continues in the roster of Protestant Denominations with a strong resemblance to its Catholic ancestor.

History

While the Reformation raged on the Continent, a different reaction to Rome emerged on the island nation England. One facet of this was financial. The English people resented seeing their donations to English Churches transported to the Continent, enriching the coffers of the Church in Rome. Another facet was political. English patriots resented the Roman Pontiff's ability to interfere in the affairs of their own sovereign state. Another facet was religious. With the development of the Puritan mind, many English clergymen agreed that Rome had excessively departed from Scripture in religious practices, stopping short of accepting Luther's and Calvin's criticism of Catholic theology. They wanted the Church changed, but not radically so as was happening on the Continent. Still another facet of this reaction involved the personal life of King Henry VIII. He wanted an annulment from his marriage to Catherine of Aragon to which the Pope would not agree. Henry was determined to get what he wanted even if it meant a break from Rome.

Timing was right for Henry VIII. With an air of independence and reform permeating many of the German States, and a growing discontent with the Catholic hierarchical excesses, He was able to remove his entire Country from the jurisdiction of the Pope without causing a spiritual panic among the people. In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy which separated the Church of England from Rome and designated the King of England as its head.

Before Henry became King, he had studied for the Priesthood, and so was familiar with theology and other church matters. Influenced by the new Puritan mind set, he was concerned about more than just the freedom to divorce and his wife. *“He desired the Church to be humbled, but also to be purified and rendered more efficient by his reforms....He increased the number of bishoprics out of the monastic revenues, encouraged the translation of the Scriptures into English, and the issue of books which would make the doctrines of Faith and the duties of a Christian plain to all. He destroyed objects of superstitious veneration which were impostures; he even allowed the Litany to be published in English.”*

(* page 73)

Henry's design was not to create another Protestant Denomination, as was happening in other parts of Europe, but to create a purified Catholic Denomination. *“Except that he removed the name of the Pope from the service books and declared the Church of Rome to be abominable, he did nothing which was contrary to Catholicism as understood in the West....At any time Henry agreed to a concordat with Rome, he had done nothing which could not have been sanctioned, except his taking the title of “Supreme Head” and his vilification of the Pope.”* (*page 73)

The Church of England would have remained purely Catholic if Henry had lived long enough to insure it. Unfortunately, Henry died at the age of fifty six leaving the throne to his too weak too young son, Edward. Protestant elements in the Kingdom pushed their agenda and tried to change Henry's commitment of the State Church to Catholic doctrine. Catholics were persecuted and imprisoned. Edward, however, died at the age of 15, leaving the throne to the 16 year old Lady Jane Grey who was quickly deposed by Edward's half sister, Mary - a devout Catholic. Under her short reign of five years, the Church of England was technically returned to the Pope and Protestants were persecuted ruthlessly. Things finally settled down after 1558 when Mary died, leaving the throne to another half sister, Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth I lacked some finer character qualities but was a capable sovereign. She successfully brought the Church to a cohesion of Catholic and Protestant elements and established Anglicanism in its modern form.

“The great crisis of the Reformation was passed through by the English Church in a manner very different from any other. It declared its independence of Rome without abandoning its claim to be a branch of the Universal Church. At the same time it accepted the Protestant view that the Scriptures are the supreme tests of the lawfulness both of doctrine and practice. As a result the Church of England has always acknowledged that the Church of Rome has conserved much that is important, and that the Protestants have rendered an immense service to religion by taking a firm stand on the authority of the Bible. In consequence Anglicanism is in sympathy with both aspects of Western Christianity.” (* Preface page v)

The Episcopal Church came into existence as an independent denomination after the American Revolution. The Church of England had successfully planted Anglican parishes throughout the Colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries. But when the Colonies declared their independence from England, the Anglican parishes were thrust into a very precarious position. They were in a land that was politically severed from the mother Country, but the Anglican Churches in that land were still directly tied ecclesiastically to the mother Church in England.

Many of the American Anglicans were loyal to the King, but not all. The Patriots endured the Revolution, keeping the Anglican Parishes intact. But the idea emerged, when England conceded defeat, to form an independent Anglican Church in the United States. William White, rector of Christ Church in Philadelphia put the idea forward and by 1785 the Protestant Episcopal Church was taking shape. By 1789, all the Anglican parishes had been brought together in a national Episcopal Church and the transition was complete. They proclaimed at that time that, "This Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship." Thus, while the American Episcopal Church was technically independent of the Church of England, it acknowledged with affectionate spiritual loyalty its ties to its Anglican parent. To this day, it willingly and openly identifies itself as the American branch of the Anglican Church.

Doctrine

1. Purging the Roman Excesses

The most significant factor in understanding the doctrine of Anglicanism is the Church's own conviction that it has preserved Catholic doctrine in its pure historic form. All the Reformers started with a simple desire to clean out the excesses from the Church and restore it to what it was in the beginning. Most of them eventually concluded that this was not possible and separated themselves into independent Protestant groups. As they did so many also found it necessary to change their theology and some changed their form of worship as well. The independent Church of England, however, claimed not to have changed either of these things. Instead, it insisted it preserved what was scriptural and merely eliminated the excesses added by the Roman Church in recent centuries. It reasoned that if a doctrine or a religious practice could not be verified by biblical statement or had not been observed by the early Church it could not be trusted as valid. By this rationale, Anglicanism considers itself to be the true link with historic Christianity and the caretaker of its continuation.

Following this principle, Anglicanism eliminated the Adoration of Mary by which Christians were encouraged to address prayers to her. It maintained an attitude of great respect for her because the ancient Third General Council of Ephesus had said "she gave birth to God." From this it concluded she was worthy of the two festivals held in her honor every year, but not to receive the prayers of the saints on earth.

It eliminated the elevation of the host in the mass for two reasons. First, there was no evidence it was practiced in the early church; and secondly, but more importantly, it was associated with the doctrine of Transubstantiation. Transubstantiation was rejected because it suggested the Priest was capable of performing a miracle in the mass. The notion that a real presence of Christ existed in the bread and wine of communion was accepted, however, which is very much like the consubstantiation of Luther.

It also eliminated prayer for the dead. This was viewed as a doctrine of extortion since money had to be paid to a Priest so that he would say a prayer for a dead relative or friend during a mass. The more you wanted your loved one to escape the torture of Purgatory, the more you had to pay. At one point, many "Priests" were hired by wealthy private citizens with no other duties than to say prayers for dead family members. This was viewed as a serious abuse of the Church and a commercialization of religion solely for the enrichment of Churchmen.

Some other things were also excluded such as the use of images and relics, prayers to the saints, and the doctrine of purgatory. These all were considered to be vainly invented and repugnant to the Word of God.

2. Ceremony

The yearly Calendar, which included festivals, special days in honor of saints and Apostles, and Holy Seasons such as Lent and Advent, were kept intact. Essentially, the Christian year remained the same as it had been for a very long time. Every day, the priest recited the Morning and Evening Prayers with little change in the way it had been done before. The effect of this was to provide a continuity for the common people who were little aware of the breach of Rome because the details of their own religious experience was practically the same as it had always been.

"In a word, the whole design of Anglicanism is to make sure that a Catholic-minded Christian shall lack nothing necessary to his spiritual satisfaction, whilst nothing which a Protestant can reasonably condemn as superstitious or unscriptural, is retained to be a just cause of offence." (* page 121)

3. Influences.

Through the years, several influences had a bearing on the theology of the Anglican Communion. The Puritans wanted to preserve the High Church atmosphere of worship and the doctrines which were distinctively Catholic as opposed to some of the radical ideas of the Protestants. Luther's influence brought about the rejection of Transubstantiation, and Calvin's influence reinforced a strong view of predestination and election. Broad minded Churchmen kept the superstitious elements out, and in the seventeenth century, the Wesley brothers brought an evangelical element in.

The result is that Anglican and Episcopal doctrine truly is a mixture of a variety of perspectives. There are definite evidences of Catholicism, but there are definite evidences of Protestantism as well. Whether it can be said that it is a continuation of genuine historic Christianity is suspect. The worship of these churches clearly resembles the high church atmosphere of Roman Catholic worship, even if some of the more superstitious elements have been eliminated. And, their doctrines include some concepts that are clearly not biblically based.

4. Sin and Salvation

Anglican theologians cleaned up the Catholic error which separated original sin and personal sins into two separate entities. They brought them together defining original sin as the corruption of human nature and personal sins as the fruit of that corruption. They also affirmed that every human being was affected by the corruption of sin.

They also affirmed that Christ died for all sin. Whereas the Catholics claimed that Christ died only for original sin, leaving the individual to pay for his own personal sins, Anglican doctrine states that Christ was offered once making perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual.

As truly evangelical as this sounds, the glitch comes in their view on how salvation is actually transferred to a repentant sinner. They say that faith is the essential ingredient and that a person is justified by faith in Christ. They also say that a man's works merit nothing in being saved from sin.

They insist, however, that this justification by faith is transferred to the account of an individual through the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. In the catechism of the Episcopal Church it is stated that *"Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. The outward visible sign of Baptism is water.... The inward and spiritual grace of Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit."* Regarding Communion it says, *"The Eucharist is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself. The outward visible sign in the Eucharist is bread and wine.... The inward and spiritual grace in the Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ given to his people, and received by faith. The benefits we receive are the forgiveness of our sins, the strengthening of our union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is our nourishment in eternal life."*

Rebuttal

The Anglican Communion, including Episcopal Churches, should be commended for their expressed desire to believe and practice only that which can be confirmed by Scripture. However, its interest in preserving the "best" of Catholicism while appeasing the concerns of Protestantism prevented it from being truly objective in observing what Scripture says.

The Bible nowhere teaches the concept of a sacrament - a tangible element or activity by which God transfers His grace to a human being. Man is justified purely by faith in Christ alone and God transfers His grace to the life of a human being on the basis of that faith and nothing else. Baptism is only a symbol after the fact and the bread and wine of communion are only symbolic reminders of the offering of Christ for sin.

Scripture says, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith..."* (Ephesians 2:10). That is all. If we believe the Gospel in our heart and confess Christ with our mouth we shall be saved! (Romans 10:9-10). The Ethiopian Eunuch was permitted, therefore, to be baptized with water because he already believed in his heart and was thus already saved before he was baptized (Acts 8:37). The Corinthian believers were told that as often as they participated in Communion they showed the Lord's death, not that they received it - a very important distinction (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Again, Scripture says that Abraham believed God and his belief was counted unto him for righteousness (Romans 4:3). No sacrament was involved in Abraham's justification and Abraham is called the father of all who are justified by faith; *"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all"* (Romans 4:16).

In addition, the Church in the beginning divorced itself from the ceremony of the Temple and worshiped God in a simple, humble way. It met in homes, shared group singing of hymns and spiritual songs, and emphasized the preaching of the Word of God. The High Church form of worship which has been preserved in the Anglican Communion is not a continuation of early Christian worship, but a carry over of a Roman invention devised at least in part from Roman paganism. True, Anglicanism eliminated many of the superstitious elements, but it still maintains the centrality of the sacrament of the Mass and relegates the preaching of the Word of God to a secondary element of worship.

Puritanism sounds like a noble thing; but since the Roman Catholic Church has digressed so dramatically from what God intended the Church to be, completely stripping that Church of its Romish characteristics would leave an empty box. A group of believers in England, that became known during the Reformation as the Separatists, had a better idea. They completely disassociated themselves from the official Church and started all over again using the Bible alone as their guide. This is the heritage of today's Separatist Churches otherwise labeled Independency. In direct contrast to the Anglican Communion that claims to be both Catholic and Protestant, Separatists are neither. They are the true inheritors of ancient Christianity. They hold the real claim to the continuity of Biblical Faith from the Apostles to our present day.



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- Holy Communion
- The Thirty-Nine Articles
- What Is the Episcopal Church?

CHAPTER EIGHT

METHODISM

ITS HISTORY

Methodism was started as a society within the Church of England by John Wesley and his associates. But the story of Methodism actually begins in the heart of Jacobus Arminius.

Arminius lived from 1560 to 1609. He grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church in the wake of the Reformation giants, Martin Luther and John Calvin; but as a Reformed clergyman, he reacted against their predestinarian doctrine concerning the grace of God and the redemption of man. The resulting Arminian theology led to a great division of religious thought within Protestantism that has lasted until today.

Arminius taught that redemption was universal, not limited as the predestinarians believed. He taught that every human being, though a sinner, was able by his free will to believe in God and to receive the salvation God offered him. He said that man could resist the grace of God and refuse salvation even though God wanted to give it to him. And in addition, he taught that salvation could be lost even after a man had been in possession of it. But besides all this, Arminius promoted freedom of thought among believers and encouraged diversity. He believed that getting along with one another was more important than creating theological controversy.

Arminian theology bore a great influence upon the Church of England and lodged in the heart of many of its clergymen, including John Wesley's father, who recorded his Arminian views in several of his publications. His mother also wrote about it in a letter to John dated 1725, "*The Doctrine of Predestination, as maintained by rigid Calvinists, is very shocking, and ought utterly to be abhorred; because it charges the most Holy God with being the Author of sin.*" His parent's Arminian influence had much to do with the ultimate shaping of the Methodist movement.

The early part of John Wesley's life was wrought with many struggles. As a student, he wrestled with the worldly atmosphere of Oxford University. As a newly ordained Deacon in the Church of England, he unsuccessfully tried his hand at pastoring a small Church. He had severe health problems, and he was never quite sure what he should do with his life.

In 1729, at the age of twenty-three, he became a faculty member at Oxford and joined the company of his brother Charles and Charles' new friends. Together they formed a society for intellectual stimulation, but the pursuit of holiness quickly emerged as their primary objective. It was not long until their lives stood out as a great contrast to the loose and lazy lifestyles of the other students and professors. They methodically prayed aloud three times every day and silently every hour, gave most of their money to the poor, visited the sick and imprisoned, and meticulously observed the ordinances of the Church.

Everyone else at Oxford considered them strange and labeled them "methodists" or "the holy club" or used some other epithet against their strict regimen. The term methodists stuck and Wesley fondly used it himself in later years to refer to the adherents of his movement.

John's life continued to be filled with struggles. His father had always wanted him to take his place as a pastor, but he persistently refused. After his father's death, John went to America as a missionary to the Indians in Georgia, but miserably failed in his attempts to evangelize them. He did no better with the Colonists. Then to make matters worse, he botched an opportunity to marry a young woman and scandalously refused her communion after she married another man.

But during this trip to America, he was greatly impressed by a group of Christians called the Moravians. Back in England, he attended Moravian meetings and upon hearing a sermon on the effect of faith in Christ, had a conversion experience which was accompanied by a warm sensation in his body.

John finally knew what he should do with his life. He would be an evangelist and win the lost to Christ. With his associates, he preached in the open air where ever he could find a hearing.

The common folks of England flocked to these evangelistic sermons and were touched with the wonderful message that God loved them and gave His Son on the cross to save them. The Catholic Church had told their grandfathers that man must pay for his own sins. The Reformed preachers said that only a small group called the elect could ever hope to go to heaven. Now this new message reached their hearts. The holy club preached that salvation was free for the asking to everyone including the most base members of the human race. All they needed to do was believe the gospel and be converted. Many did and were -- by the hundreds and the thousands. As a result, Methodist societies were formed all over Great Britain and the American Colonies.

When Methodism moved to America, it was still just a society, or group of societies, within the Church of England. Both John and Charles Wesley wanted it to remain that way, but the American Revolution seemed to make that improbable, and another factor made the organizing of a separate Methodist church inevitable.

The number of Methodist societies had grown so large in the Colonies that there were not enough Anglican clergymen nor enough itinerant Methodist preachers to oversee them. Wesley organized the societies into circuits and left local laymen in charge when the circuit preachers were not present. But none of the Methodist preachers were ordained and none had the authority to administer the sacraments. Wesley encouraged the society members to attend the Anglican churches to receive communion, but the free wheeling Methodists were not welcome in the formal services of those Churches.

The only solution was to ordain the Methodist preachers. But John Wesley had no authority to ordain and the Anglican Bishops would not ordain the Methodists. Wesley began to think that he should ordain without the authority to do so but realized the breach this would cause between his societies and the Church of England. The outcome of the Revolution made him resolve that he had no other choice and he ordained several men to serve as Bishops in the United States. This led to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the severance of the societies from Anglicanism. John's brother Charles deplored the act and John himself wondered if he had done the right thing to the day he died. His objective had never been to start a new Church, and he personally never left the Church of England.

Wesley supported the new Methodist Church in America by sending it a document called the Twenty Five Articles, an Arminian edition of the original Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England. He also provided two other documents as the basis for theological interpretation: "Fifty Two Sermons of John Wesley" and "Notes on the New Testament."

In the course of time, Methodism would divide often. But in 1939, the process began to reverse itself. The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church merged to form the Methodist Church. In 1946, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church merged to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Then these two larger bodies merged in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church, a combination of five separate denominations, all of which shared the same roots in Arminian theology and Episcopal church structure.

The United Methodist Church today represents a large part of the Methodist movement, but not nearly all of it. There are many evidences of the influence of Methodism and Arminianism in such denominations as the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyan Church, several Churches of God, and the entire Pentecostal movement.

ITS DOCTRINE

1. The Philosophy of Free Thinking

To understand Methodist doctrine, a knowledge of two things is required: the rudiments of Arminianism, and the Arminian philosophy of free thinking. The teachings of John Wesley were thoroughly Arminian and the documents he gave his followers are still a source for theological thought among Methodists today. But all Methodist doctrine is made arbitrary by the idea of free thinking.

Reformers like Luther and Calvin insisted on strict adherence to a well defined doctrinal statement. In strong contrast to this, Jacobus Arminius promoted latitude in theological thought. Passed on through Wesley, this reluctance to be dogmatic about doctrine has become a prominent characteristic of Methodism.

Methodists have never been too doctrinally conscious. They 'lead with their hearts instead of their heads,' a popular magazine has said of them. The practical living of the Christian life has always meant more to Methodists than hair-splitting theological discussions. 'Is thine heart right as my heart is with thy heart?' Wesley was accustomed to ask when men wanted to argue with him over matters of doctrine. 'If it is, give me thy hand.' Another time he explained, 'In opinions that do not strike at the root of Christianity, we Methodists think and let think' (****page 26).

This open mindedness makes it very difficult to convince Christians influenced by Arminianism that what one believes is important. Their attitude is, "You believe what you want to and I will believe what I want to and we will all get along in spite of our differences." The bishops of the Methodist Church put it this way in 1952, "*Our theology has never been a closely organized doctrinal system. We have never insisted on uniformity of thought or statement*" (**** page 26). As a result, the only thing Methodism requires of its ministers or church officers or those being confirmed into the church is that they agree with the articles of faith "in spirit and in essentials."

This also makes it very difficult to understand exactly what Methodists believe. Any given Methodist preacher may preach something entirely different from other Methodist preachers and still be considered a good Methodist because he has the freedom to think on his own. Individual members are welcome in local Methodist Churches without regard to what they believe in a spirit of freedom and tolerance. The long term effect of this has been to make the profile of Methodism fluid and changeable. What many Methodists believe

today is vastly different from what John Wesley preached in the Eighteenth Century. And then again, some Methodists are still very much like John Wesley. Some are, and some aren't, but the difference does not seem to matter to any of them.

2. The Bible

Methodist doctrine teaches that the Bible is the primary source for Christian belief and conduct. The key word is "primary," for Methodism teaches that one must guard against a "ferocious literalism" in interpreting the Bible. Common sense and reason must be considered as one reads the Word of God and comes to an understanding of its meaning. Its meaning is not absolute, but is based upon one's own experience making a rational adjustment of the meaning of Scripture necessary as it relates to each individual. In addition, man's reason is just as capable as the Bible in leading a person to the basic concepts of truth.

We United Methodists offer a twofold approach. First, *within* the community of faith the Bible, reasonably interpreted in the light of tradition and Christian experience, is the primary basis and guide. Second, we affirm confidence in man's reason as normative in the general quest for truth. This confidence in reason is felt even in regard to the formation of an overall world view with God as the ultimate Mind. This world view, attainable by the reasoning mind, lends support from 'outside,' as it were, to what is already affirmed in the Bible. And it enables us to communicate with those multitudes who are unavoidably involved in doubts and who are not yet receptive to the biblical revelation (**page 12).

This view of interpreting Scripture from one's experience in combination with the view of free thinking has led many Methodist leaders to doubt or even deny the inspiration of Scripture. They have accepted the arguments of higher criticism that claim the words of the Bible are merely the words of men, some even going so far as saying the Bible is corrupt. As a result, man's reason, or his "common sense" derived from his own observations of human experience, has for many Methodists actually become their primary basis of understanding God and God's expectations of people, rising above the importance of Scripture.

3. Salvation

Much of what Methodism teaches about salvation is evangelical, at least in old fashioned Methodism. It proclaims that every man is a sinner. Redemption is available to everyone. Jesus died for the whole human race, satisfying God for the sin of all mankind. Without Christ a man is condemned to Hell. But by believing in Christ and receiving him as Savior, a man may be saved and spend eternity in Heaven.

Wesley added a little experientialism, though, to the concept of conversion. Because he had sensed a warm feeling in his body at the moment of his own conversion, he identified this as the witness of the Holy Spirit confirming his salvation to be real. In Wesley's own words, "*By the testimony of the Spirit, I mean an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I even I, am reconciled to God*" (****page 67).

This experience at conversion became all important in Methodist evangelism. It eventually led to long impassioned invitations in which respondents were kept at the altar until they felt the witness of the Spirit and experienced justification. Without the witness of the Spirit, they could not be accepted as truly converted.

4. Christian Perfection, or the Second Work of Grace

Conversion was not enough for Wesley and those who shared with him the Arminian mind. The justification received at conversion needed to be complimented by an additional experience of sanctification.

From his early days at Oxford and the formation of the Holy Club, John Wesley believed the pursuit of holiness to be a vital part of the Christian life. Initially, he thought holiness was achieved through a gradual process; but as he was exposed to those who testified of a second blessing experience, he became convinced of the idea of instantaneous sanctification which takes place some time after a person's instantaneous justification. Wesley's writings are filled with his advocacy of this doctrine.

After meeting the Society, I talked with a sensible woman, whose experience seemed peculiar. She said: 'A few days before Easter last, I was deeply convinced of sin and in Easter week I knew that my sins were forgiven, and was filled with joy and peace in believing. But in about eighteen days I was convinced, in a dream, of the necessity of a higher salvation; and I mourned day and night, in agony of desire, to be thoroughly sanctified, till,

on the twenty-third day after my justification, I found a total change, together with a clear witness that the blood of Jesus had cleansed me from all unrighteousness' (Journal, June 23, 1761 -- *page 82).

By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favor of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as a grain of mustard seed, which at first, is the least of all seeds, but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love of God and man (Sermons vol. li. page 236 -- *page 54).

You may obtain a growing victory over sin from the moment you are justified. But this is not enough. The body of sin, the carnal mind, must be destroyed; the old man must be slain, or we can not put on the new man, which is created after God (or which is the image of God) in righteousness and true holiness; and this is done in a moment. To talk of this work as being gradual, would be nonsense, as much as if we talked of gradual justification (Journal of H.A. Rogers p.174 -- *page 55).

He came to believe that this experience completely removed sin from a person's heart and replaced it with the holy love of God. The results included the total elimination of negative thoughts and desires, critical speech and sinful attitudes. It also included the noble desire to love one's neighbors as himself and the ability to live a most exemplary life.

Eventually, this particular doctrine would become a cause for several divisions within Methodism, fostering several other denominations and the Holiness movement. The reason for such divisions involved disagreements upon how well mainline Methodism was sticking to the pursuit of holiness, and disagreements over the means by which holiness was to be achieved.

5. Falling From Grace

Methodism also teaches that a man may lose his salvation, rejecting the idea of eternal security.

Other people say, 'Once in grace always in grace.' What does this mean? It means that after we have become real Christians we cannot fall away from the life of grace. In other words, it means that *after* we are Christians we have no freedom to turn away from Christ. But we United Methodists believe that we are still free to turn away from Christ even while we are Christians. Here again we take our human freedom seriously. Why do we think this way? Because both the Bible and common sense require it (**page 117).

Note the emphasis once again on common sense. Bible verses are taken out of their context and given the meaning that allows for a Christian to forfeit his salvation because common sense tells them it must be so.

Methodism even teaches that a person may lose his salvation after he has experienced the second work of grace and has been entirely sanctified. In John Wesley's words,

That many of these did not retain the gift of God (entire sanctification), is no proof that it was not given them. (Journal, October 1762 -- *page 83).

6. The Sacraments

In general, Methodism teaches that baptism and the Lord's supper are symbolic, as "signs of possession," not regeneration itself. But it retains some Anglican language and practices regarding these ordinances, which it calls sacraments. Methodists baptize infants, and in doing so seem to go somewhat beyond the concept of symbolism.

Methodists together with the great majority of Christians believe strongly in the baptism of infants. Through this act parents dedicate their children to Almighty God, and the church believes that God uses baptism to claim his own and put his seal upon them in a unique way (Understanding p.148).

Methodism rejects the Catholic concept of transubstantiation, but still believes that something can happen within the believer when he receives the elements of the Lord's Supper by faith. Included in their ritual observance of Communion is a prayer of confession by the Congregation and a statement of absolution read by the minister.

To be fair, Methodism does not teach that a person is saved, or justified, or even sanctified by partaking of baptism or the Lord's supper. They do, however, call these things sacraments and they do use an accompanying liturgy, matters that are helping many Methodists become comfortable with the idea of some form of reconciliation with the Catholic Church.

7. The Second Coming of Christ

Methodism does not consider discussing future events to be very profitable. It teaches instead that what we experience now is far more important than things that will come in the future.

As a general thing United Methodists have so fixed their attention upon the things of Christ which pertain to life here and now that they have not in practice gone deeply into the full import of the second coming. This is in part due to John Wesley's own common sense way of viewing the matter. He believed the doctrine. But he always balanced off his interpretation of it with practical good sense. So by its very nature United Methodism avoids extremes here *page 115).

Here again the influence of common sense is quite evident. By it, the Second Coming of Christ is reduced to a general hope that God will some day make the entire human environment perfect. In anticipation of this, all Christians need do is make the most of the here and now.

The great point in Christianity, however, is not to wait eagerly for some event that lies hidden in God. The great point is to let the living Christ do his wonder work in us now. So, as long as we are here on earth, we must be about our Lord's business (**Page 116).

8. Modernism

An understanding of some Denominations can be derived from its historic doctrines because what was taught by their founders has been preserved throughout their history. However, a discussion of Methodism (and some other Denominations) requires an understanding both of what it was in its beginnings and what it has become through time. The philosophy of Free Thinking, by its very nature, leads to radical changes in the doctrines and practices of a religious body because it allows and even encourages diversity. Such has been the case in Methodism. Throughout the Twentieth Century, modernism has greatly altered the very nature of the movement.

A. Doctrinal Deviation. The doctrinal beliefs, or disbeliefs, of modern Methodists leaders are so far away from the true Word of God that they can no longer be considered evangelical. The following are some of their heretical teachings:

1. The Trinity is only a New Testament doctrine developed to express man's understanding of the One God.
2. The God that Moses talked to on top of Mt. Sinai was only a mountain deity.
3. Jesus never claimed to be God.
4. Jesus was not born of a virgin.
5. The Cross is not necessary to satisfy God.
6. Isaiah 53 does not speak of Christ.
7. The Resurrection of Christ is not literal.
8. Men are not born with a corrupt human nature.
9. The new birth is a stage in human development.
10. Satan is not a real person.
11. The Antichrist is a creature of ancient superstition.
12. Muhammadanism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Buddhism are great faiths.
13. Christ's teachings included the exalted insights of these other religions.
14. Eternal destiny is not settled at death.
15. A purgatorial discipline occurs after death.
16. The Bible description of heaven and hell is imagination run riot.
17. Christ will not return personally.

18. Paul was mistaken about the Second Coming.
19. Christ did not teach the Second Coming.
20. The Kingdom will come through social reform.

B. **Ecumenism.** Ecumenism is a natural by-product of modernism and free thinking. Since the Methodist Church does not enforce strict adherence to its doctrines among its own members, it easily cooperates with a variety of denominations whose beliefs are much different from its own.

C. **The Social Gospel.** Modernism has redefined the gospel as social activism. In preaching about profits, and wages, and economic trends and social forces, it claims that it is preaching "the faith once delivered to the saints." It even goes so far as to repudiate the old time gospel as worthless and a waste of time. In supposing what the Prophet Amos would say to God's people today, one Methodist writer said,

Your fine churches, your revival meetings, your missionary programs, and all your lavish services mean nothing to God. Nothing whatever! If you want to win his favor, then abolish your slums, stop your wars, readjust your wage scales, clean up your theaters, and put an end to racial discrimination (**page 73).

D. **An occasional good preacher.** Because Methodism is open minded, it may even on occasion tolerate someone who actually believes the Bible. Historically, Methodism respected Scripture as the Word of God and proclaimed a clear Gospel message. Many sincere men labored over Methodist circuits, unaware perhaps of all which Methodism consisted, or even of what John Wesley himself believed. However, many Methodists were rudely awakened in the merger of 1968. Whole congregations severed their ties and became independent Bible believing Churches. And, to this day, individual Christians continue to trickle out of the Methodist Church looking for the truth.

Rebuttal

It is sad to find out what Methodism has become. But there are several doctrinal problems within historic Methodism without even considering the disastrous influence of modernism.

The meaning of the Bible is not based upon common sense. It was written by God and it means what God intended it to mean -- nothing else. Each statement, each word of Scripture is inspired and inerrant and its interpretation is fixed for eternity. It is not up to man to figure out what the words of the Bible mean in light of his personal experience, it is up to man to figure out what God intended them to mean. And this can only come from a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Salvation is not based upon an experience. Certainly, salvation occurs in a single moment of time; and the joy of salvation may result in some wonderful feelings. But the witness of the Spirit is a witness of the truth and not a physical or emotional sensation. A person may know he is saved because of the promise of God, and not because of a warm feeling in his body. The trustworthy Word of God says a man is saved if he has believed the gospel in his heart and has confessed it with his mouth.

Neither does salvation come in stages. There is no second work of grace. At the moment a person confesses his sins before God and receives Jesus Christ as his Savior, he is justified and equipped with all he needs to pursue the righteousness of God which is by faith. A Christian can be victorious by the grace of God and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. But only at the rapture/resurrection event is this mortal, corruptible flesh changed into incorruption. As long as we live on earth, the struggle between the flesh and the spirit will continue.

Furthermore, eternal security is essential to the very nature of eternal life. Just as it is not within man's power to obtain his own salvation, it is not within his power to retain it. So it is that man's security is not based upon his ability to keep himself in the grace of God, but upon God's ability to keep him. Of course, man is given the freedom to believe the gospel or reject it. But once he willingly receives the grace of God and is saved, he is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise and kept by the power of God forever. This seal is not a violation of the will of man but a protection of it, so that he may willingly participate in the righteousness of God without fearing his own limitations.

Finally, free thinking and tolerance is destructive to the integrity of truth. If truth is not absolute, then we cannot trust in anything with confidence because truth may change and leave us behind. If we cannot be confident that we know the truth, then we will constantly be afraid that we have missed it altogether. If we cannot contend for the truth, then we cannot protect it from those who would change it into a lie. But truth is absolute, and we can have confidence that we know the truth and on behalf of those who desperately need to hear it, we must contend for the truth and keep it just the way it was when God originally gave it to us.

John Wesley was a fervent preacher, but he was not a fundamentalist. He was buried in the garb of an Anglican clergyman because he was an Anglican to the day he died. He preached a gospel soiled by

Arminianism and experientialism. And he laid a foundation which made it possible for many of his followers to go far away from the truth.

Methodism began with a very simplistic but sincere objective -- to follow a regimen which leads to a holy life, pleasing unto God. It has ended up being a very liquid church, constantly changing its shape, dividing and conforming to many different molds. What will it be tomorrow? Certainly not what it was yesterday.

Many average Christians feel comfortable in a local Methodist Church because of the evangelical gospel that used to be preached there. Some well meaning believers continue in Methodist Churches because of what it used to stand for. From the outset though, Methodism was destined to change. Arminius and Wesley both believed the essentials of the Gospel were sufficient grounds for getting along with others and that controversy in theology was fruitless. The process of tolerance and diversity has left many Methodist Churches mere empty shells of the fervent societies that sprang from one man's conversion experience. Maybe a little controversy in the beginning would have saved the whole movement from such a wandering path.📖

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CHAPTER NINE

Pentecostalism And The Charismatic Movement

On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus was crucified, 120 people who already believed in Jesus as the Christ were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and spoke in languages they had never studied or learned. This event is recorded in Acts Chapter 2 and two similar events are recorded in Acts chapters 10 and 19. Pentecostalism is the belief that these experiences in the Book of Acts teach that this same event is available to Christians today. This belief consists of two elements: that salvation and receiving the Holy Spirit are two different events which do not occur at the same time and that speaking in tongues is the evidence a person has received the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism is a belief held by many Denominations such as The Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Church of God, The Pentecostal Holiness Church, The Open Bible Standard Churches, and The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, along with many others.

Charismatic is a term which describes the manifestation of miracle activities such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, and healing the sick regardless of their denominational context. Many Denominations which are not Pentecostal in doctrine have members who participate in such miracle activities. In fact, Charismatic activity has been manifested in nearly every Denomination within Christianity, Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal alike.

Pentecostalism is the grandchild of Methodism. Methodism gave birth to the Holiness Movement at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century and the Holiness Movement gave birth to Pentecostalism at the end of the Nineteenth Century. These three generations of Christianity have had a profound effect upon the Church and the world.

HISTORY

1. John Wesley's Seed

For a very long time, physical experience had been associated with spiritual activity within Christianity. Initially, this association consisted of individuals participating in objective physical activities in order to obtain God's spiritual blessings. For example, Catholicism taught that submitting to the waters of baptism, receiving the elements of communion, and doing penance were means by which God transferred salvation and forgiveness to a human life. This idea was carried over into several of the new Protestant groups during the Reformation. Though they rejected the excesses of Catholicism, they still believed that God transferred his spiritual blessings to human lives by means of tangible instruments such as water and bread and wine. Such things left an emptiness in the human heart, however, because one never knew if he had done enough objective physical activities to satisfy the spiritual need in his life.

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley had an experience that introduced to Christianity a new association between physical experience and spiritual activity. On that day he had a conversion experience during which he felt a warm sensation inside his body. He declared that this physical sensation was none other than the witness of the Holy Spirit. It was not an objective experience like being baptized or eating from the communion table; rather, it was entirely subjective. Wesley believed the Holy Spirit imposed this feeling on him as a confirmation that his conversion was real. And, by this means, he was finally able to know that he was right with God.

Very soon after his conversion, Wesley encountered another experience in the lives of his followers which he labeled the "second blessing." This second experience after conversion was accompanied by a variety of physical sensations including shouting and falling down. He described the spiritual side of this experience as an instantaneous transfer of holiness to the believer's life which enabled him to perfectly exercise the love of God in his daily life. The physical side was again credited to the Holy Spirit.

Thus Wesley built Methodism on the belief that a subjective physical experience was the evidence that God had transferred His spiritual blessings to human lives. He taught that such physical sensations were directly attributable to the work of the Holy Spirit. Without a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit, no one could claim to be converted or sanctified, but with them, a person would be happily welcomed into the family of God.

2. The Holiness Movement

The second blessing doctrine became the hallmark of Methodism and the very thing that would give birth to the Holiness Movement and eventually to Pentecostalism. What began as a denominational distinctive quickly became a movement, spilling over from Methodism into many other denominations. Pentecostalism, today, continues to carry the interdenominational torch of the Holiness Movement with special emphasis on the physical manifestations that occurred in early Holiness revival meetings.

In the early Nineteenth Century, there was a great movement of revival in the United States fostered by Methodist preachers. Many think this was a wonderful period in Church History during which many were turned to Christ. Some people were undoubtedly saved during these revival meetings, but much of the early revival preaching focused more on the second blessing than on the first. Even more important to note is that the entire emphasis of the American revival movement of the Nineteenth Century was on the physical manifestations of these "spiritual" experiences.

Revival meetings of the early 1800's resembled modern Pentecostal services. The preachers were overcome with emotion and "shouted and exhorted with all possible energy." Some of the listeners responded with floods of screams, others by falling on the floor, sometimes lying in trances for hours, sometimes jerking and shaking in every joint. Still others might crawl on all fours and bark like dogs, convinced they were chasing the devil up a tree. Sometimes everyone present at the revival meeting would be seized with holy laughter, and some would dance wildly in the aisles, while others would speak in tongues. All of this was, of course, looked upon as the confirmation that the Holy Spirit had come upon each individual and caused these phenomena to occur.

From the year 1800 until the Civil War, Holiness preaching bore perhaps the single greatest influence on American society. It was so imposing on the Church that preachers of many denominations were led to forsake the doctrines of their own churches and adopt a Holiness theology. In the 1830's and 40's, the emphasis of the Holiness Movement turned from Camp Meeting experiences to reforming social policy. Holiness ideas were the seeds that molded public opinion concerning such things as women's rights, the abolition of slavery and prohibition. It was reasoned that if individuals could be truly holy, then the presence of many holy individuals should produce a more perfect society.

In the two decades preceding the Civil War, the Holiness Movement was kept burning brightly by the influence of Phoebe and Walter Palmer. Phoebe held regular meetings in her parlor on Tuesdays during which she served as the mentor for hundreds of preachers and layman from many denominational backgrounds. She and her husband then traveled all over the North American Continent, sustaining widespread enthusiasm for the second blessing doctrine.

The Civil War caused only a brief interruption to the momentum of the Holiness Movement. The conflict made it appear that American society was falling apart rather than moving toward perfection. But when the War resulted in the abolition of slavery, perfectionist preaching renewed with great fervor.

Soon after the War, The National Holiness Association was formed to fan the revivalistic fires. To the end of the Century, it sustained the interest in camp meeting revivals and the preaching of the second blessing experience. Though primarily supported by Methodist Churches, the National Holiness Association maintained an independent status and was a means of causing the Holiness Movement to continue to cross nearly every denominational barrier. Under its guidance, Revivalism returned to the United States in full force and once again, the physical manifestations of conversion and sanctification were experienced during revival meetings. By the 1880's, however, many Methodist leaders were losing interest in Holiness doctrine and were turning their attention to the emerging social gospel. They were influenced by so called "higher criticism" of the biblical text which testified against the credibility of the Bible and by the theories of evolution being promoted by Charles Darwin. As the Twentieth Century grew closer and closer, Methodism drew further and further away from the preaching of Holiness.

In spite of this, many Methodists were fully dedicated to Holiness doctrine and the revivalist mind set. Being convinced that Methodist Churches were abandoning historic Methodist doctrine, it was decided that new churches were needed to preserve Holiness preaching. More than twenty groups exited Methodism over a ten year period beginning in 1895 when The Church of the Nazarene was formed in Los Angeles, California under the leadership of Phineas Bresee and Dr. J. P. Widney. These churches provided for the preservation of Holiness doctrine unto today.

3. The Pentecostal Movement

In that same year, 1895, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church was formed in Iowa to promote a new doctrine called the "third blessing." This church was founded by Benjamin Hardin Irwin who had originally been ordained a Baptist minister but changed his theology as a result of reading Wesley's writings and those of Wesley's friend, John Fletcher. It was from Fletcher's teaching of a "baptism of burning love" after the experience of sanctification that Irwin got the idea for the third blessing. Methodism had always taught that a person received the Holy Spirit at the time of his second blessing, or experience of sanctification. Irwin taught that a person needed a third experience in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

Five years earlier, Charles Fox Parham formulated a belief that speaking in tongues was the necessary evidence that a person had received the Holy Spirit. He had started a Bible School in Topeka Kansas for the purpose of training young people in Holiness doctrine. In December of 1900, Parham was scheduled to speak for three days in another place. He left his students with the assignment of studying the Bible and determining the Scriptural evidence of having received the Holy Spirit. When he returned, the entire

student body unanimously agreed that according to the Book of Acts speaking in tongues was the single evidence of being baptized by the Holy Ghost. Since this agreed with his own conclusions, Parham became convinced that this was true and began teaching this as biblical doctrine.

There were many things within the Holiness Movement that laid the foundation for Pentecostalism, but the idea that receiving the Holy Spirit in a separate experience evidenced by speaking in tongues is actually the thing that gave birth to the Pentecostal Movement. Irwin had not specified that the baptism of fire was to be accompanied by speaking in tongues, but among those who experienced the third blessing under his preaching, tongues was a typical manifestation. Parham, on the other hand, caused the third blessing and tongues to be inseparably linked. The result of the teachings of these two men was the birth of Pentecostal theology.

The event that brought the Pentecostal Movement to national attention was an outbreak of revivalist manifestations in Los Angeles California in April of 1906. W. J. Seymour was trained in Texas under the teaching of Charles Parham. After his training, Seymour became the Pastor of a little church in Los Angeles, located in an abandoned Methodist church building at 312 Azusa Street. Under Seymour's preaching, people responded in ways similar to the revival meetings of the early Nineteenth Century. In this case, however, a news reporter made the event a headline in the Los Angeles Times. He included in his article a prophecy given during a Seymour revival meeting in which an "awful destruction to this city" was predicted, "unless its citizens are brought to a belief in the tenets of the new faith." The very day after this article appeared, the great earthquake hit San Francisco. The association was immediately made to the prophecy and Pentecostalism was given a tremendous boost. Over the next twenty five years, many Pentecostal Denominations were established and the movement became a permanent part of Christianity.

In the 1920's, Pentecostal churches were divided by two more new doctrines. One was the doctrine of the "finished work" which reduced the three blessings back to two, stating that sanctification was part of the conversion experience and the only additional thing a believer needed to receive was the Holy Spirit. The other doctrine was the Jesus only Unitarian view that Jesus was the only God there is and Father, Son and Holy Spirit were merely titles by which He was variously known. The Assemblies of God was started by those who subscribed to the "finished work" doctrine. Several other denominations were started as a result of the Jesus only doctrine, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and the United Pentecostal Church.

4. The Charismatic Movement

While Pentecostalism is perpetuated today in Pentecostal Denominations, charismatic phenomena have crossed nearly every denominational barrier and gained wide acceptance in Christianity. Oral Roberts is one of the primary reasons that this happened. Beginning in 1947, Roberts built a faith-healing ministry that appealed to people of many different denominations including those which were non-Pentecostal. In 1965, he and R. O. Corvin established a Pentecostal university with a very aggressive vision to offer graduate as well as postgraduate degrees. At a dedication ceremony in April of 1967, a prominent non-Pentecostal, Dr. Billy Graham, participated and gave a signal that Pentecostals should be accepted as equal partners in the Christian community. One year later in March of 1968, Oral Roberts joined a Methodist Church and transferred his vows of ordination to that Denomination. He did so with the understanding that he would not give up any of his Pentecostal beliefs. He was accepted on those terms.

Oral Roberts could accomplish such a fete in the mid-1960's because many people in non-Pentecostal churches were speaking in tongues, seeking miracles, and following healing ministries. The Pentecostals labeled such people neo-Pentecostals, but these new Pentecostals in Protestant and Catholic churches called themselves the Charismatic Movement.

The social gospel and liturgical worship had become dry and unfulfilling for many traditional Christians. The infusion of charismatic phenomena seemed to fill this void and give life to dead churchianity. The appeal, however, was not an enlightenment of truth, but a physical experience that was defined as spiritual activity. If they could feel something in their bodies, they could believe that God had performed a work in them.

The long term effect of this has been the development of an experience based style of worship that even fundamental churches are adopting today. Churches that still reject Pentecostal doctrine are nevertheless seeking to meet the people's desire to have a physical and emotional experience in a religious context. So-called praise and worship music that sounds exactly like secular pop and rock-and-roll came directly from the Charismatic Movement, but is being accepted almost universally throughout the Church. Band instruments, drama, liturgical dance and many other physical elements are being used in non-Pentecostal Churches as a means to fulfill the association between physical experience and "spiritual blessings."

Thus, John Wesley's heart warming sensation has had a more profound influence on Christianity than nearly any other one thing. It fostered the Holiness Movement, the Pentecostal Movement and the Charismatic Movement and it has conditioned a very large percentage of the Church in all of its denominations to identify physical experience with spiritual activity.

DOCTRINE

Because Pentecostalism is not confined to a single denomination, discussing the doctrines of Pentecostalism is much more difficult than examining the teachings of a single Denomination. There are, however, certain characteristic beliefs that distinguishes Pentecostalism from other segments of Christianity.

1. Salvation

Because Pentecostalism generated from Methodism, it preaches an evangelical gospel that sounds nearly identical to that of other gospel preaching churches, with a particular Methodist flavor. Man is lost because of his sin and only by the redemptive work of Christ may a person be saved. Christ shed his blood for sin and satisfied the righteous demands of God. If a person believes this by faith, he may be converted. This conversion experience must be evidenced, however, by a witness of the Spirit in the life of the believer. The doctrinal statement of the International Pentecostal Church of Christ says,

Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

(a) Conditions to Salvation. Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God according to the hope of eternal life. (b) The Evidences of Salvation. The inward evidence of salvation is the direct witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:16). The outward evidence to all men is a life of righteousness and true holiness.

2. The Possibility of Losing One's Salvation

Just as Methodists do, Pentecostals typically believe that a person may lose his salvation. The doctrinal statement of the Free Will Baptist Church of the Pentecostal Faith says,

There are strong grounds to hope that the truly regenerate will persevere unto the end and be saved through the power of Divine grace which is pledged for their support, but their future obedience and final salvation are neither determined nor certain, since through infirmity and manifold temptations, they are in danger of falling; they ought therefore to watch and pray lest they make ship wreck of their faith and be lost.

3. Sanctification

Most Pentecostal churches teach that sanctification is an instantaneous experience, distinct from and subsequent to salvation. Wesley taught that conversion left a residue of sin in a believer's life and that sanctification removed it. This concept is believed and explained in a variety of ways by various Pentecostal churches. They generally teach that once a person is sanctified, he is able to live a holy life without sinning and to express the love of God to his fellow man in a perfect manner. One exception among Pentecostals is The Assemblies of God churches which combine sanctification with the conversion experience and teach that it is developed gradually in the daily life of the believer. The doctrinal statement of the (Original) Church of God says,

Sanctification is subsequent to regeneration. Sanctification is that act of God's free grace, by which He makes us holy: and is the **Second Definite Work of Grace**, wrought with the blood of Christ through faith in Him.

4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit

All Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, including the Assemblies of God, teach that receiving the Holy Spirit is an experience subsequent to and distinct from salvation. They also teach that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by speaking in tongues. The doctrinal statement of the Open Bible Standard Churches, Inc. says,

We believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a definite experience not identical with conversion. The initial evidence of this experience is the speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is given to endue the believe with power from on high; to give inspired utterance in witnessing for Christ; to lead the believer into

holiness and sobriety; to equip him for a practical, efficient, spirit filled soul winning ministry and service; that in as much as this is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, every believer has a right to expect His incoming to be after the same manner as recorded by the Word of God in Bible days.

5. Healing in the Atonement

Pentecostalism teaches that Christ not only conquered sin with the shedding of His blood, but conquered physical sickness as well. All Pentecostal and Charismatic churches teach that physical healing is available to all believers in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The doctrinal statement of the Church of God of Prophecy says,

Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross provided not only for the salvation of the souls of men but also for the healing of man's physical ailments. Divine healing is healing accomplished by the power of God without the aid of medicine or surgical skills. This healing virtue is available to all who believe, the same as salvation.

6. New Revelation

Typically, Pentecostal churches believe that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God and clearly state so. However, because they believe all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are active today, they also believe He is still giving revelation through some of those gifts. So, while they believe the Bible is perfectly the Word of God, they do not believe the Bible is the complete Word of God. At any given time, God might reveal something new through the gift of prophecy or some other gift of the Holy Spirit. The Doctrinal statement of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel says,

We believe that the Holy Spirit has the following gifts to bestow upon the believing church of the Lord Jesus Christ: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation....

7. Future Events.

Pentecostals and Charismatics believe in a premillennial return of Christ. They believe there is a seven year period of tribulation planned for the whole world, that Israel will be redeemed and that Christ will reign on earth for one thousand years. Some also believe that the Church will go through the Tribulation period. This does not appear to be true of all as some of their doctrinal statements recognize at least an interval of time between the Rapture and the Second Coming. Others, however, are vague about the timing of these events. The doctrinal statement of the Calvary Ministries, Inc, says,

The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years. This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel and the establishment of universal peace.

Rebuttal

When Charles Parham and the students at his Bible School determined that the Book of Acts taught perpetual Pentecostalism, they failed to take one very important factor into account. At the time the events of Acts took place, there was a unique situation that could never be duplicated again. This situation involved people who lived on earth both before and after the crucifixion and Pentecost. The 120 people who waited in the upper room in Acts Chapter 2 and the Jewish followers of John the Baptist in Acts Chapter 19 were definitely saved before the crucifixion occurred. It is reasonable to assume that the Gentile Cornelius to whom Peter was directed in Acts Chapter 10 was also saved before the crucifixion and Day of Pentecost when the Church began. All these people were saved, therefore, before the Holy Spirit was given to the Church. Obviously, everyone who was saved before the Church began and was still living after Acts Chapter 2 would have to receive the Holy Spirit subsequent to their salvation. Once this unique generation passed from the earth, never again would saved people receive the Holy Spirit in a separate event from their salvation. Everyone who was saved after Acts 2 received the Holy Spirit at the time of their salvation just as we do today. We know this to be true because of such biblical statements as Romans 8:9 where Scripture clearly says that a person does not belong to Christ if he does not have the Spirit dwelling in him. Thus the entire foundation of Pentecostalism is removed.

Salvation is a single event at which time God provides all of His spiritual blessings at once to the believing human being -- redemption, propitiation, justification, sanctification, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, etc. John 1:12 says that when a person receives Christ, he becomes a son of God. Galatians 4:6 says that because believers are sons, God has sent the Spirit into their hearts. Romans 8:9 says that a person cannot claim to belong to Christ without the Spirit dwelling within him. Clearly, the Holy Spirit indwells a person at the very moment he receives Christ as Savior; for if he did not, then salvation would have to be something other than receiving Christ. And in Christ, each believer is blessed with all spiritual blessings. This is taught in Ephesians 1:3 where the word "all" obviously includes sanctification and all other spiritual blessings.

Pentecostalism puts a very heavy emphasis on the Holy Spirit to the point of saying that this is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit (as indicated above in the doctrinal statement of the Open Bible Standard Churches, Inc). One unique characteristic of this age is indeed the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. But the Holy Spirit's purpose is not to bring attention to Himself, but to testify of Christ (John 15:26) and to enhance the effectiveness of the Body of Christ as He uses its members to accomplish the work of Christ on earth (I Corinthians 12:7; II Corinthians 3:3; Ephesians 5:9; I Peter 1:22).

Pentecostals and Charismatics alike refer to the receiving of the Holy Spirit as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This misunderstanding is one source of their error. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit entering the life and body of a believer (Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6; II Timothy 1:14). The baptism by the Holy Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit placing a believer into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). The filling of the Holy Spirit is yet another thing altogether in which the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit so that the parts of his body become instruments of righteousness under the Spirit's control (Ephesians 5:18; Romans 6:13-18). Each of these works of the Holy Spirit are clearly distinct and a right understanding of this will be a great help in understanding the events of the Book of Acts.

The Bible does teach that a person may know he is right with God, but not because his salvation, or sanctification or reception of the Holy Spirit is confirmed by a physical experience. Rather, the Bible teaches that we may know these things on the basis of the truth of the Word of God. If God promised something in His Word, then it is true regardless of what a person experiences. Thus I John 5:13 says, "*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may **know** that ye have eternal life...*" God makes many promises in His Word including the promise of eternal life to all who believe in and receive His Son, Jesus Christ. The witness of the Spirit spoken of in Romans 8:16 consists of the Spirit of God using the recorded Word of God in the Bible to assure a believer's heart that his salvation is as secure as God's ability to keep His promises. I Corinthians Chapter 2 teaches that the Holy Spirit assists a believer in developing spiritual discernment. In John 16:13, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would guide believers into all truth. Ephesians 6:17 says that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit uses the understanding of biblical truth to give a person assurance that he has a real relationship with God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

As much as we might like to be rid of physical infirmity in this life, we cannot wish it away by a false belief that Jesus Christ supplied physical healing in the atonement. Matthew 8:17 does say that the healing ministry of Jesus while He was on earth is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4 which says, "*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows*" (which is translated in Matthew as infirmities and sicknesses). But this statement in Isaiah refers to Christ's healing ministry before the crucifixion not during. When Isaiah 53:5 says that by Christ's stripes we are healed, it is referring to the spiritual healing from sin wrought by Christ being wounded for our transgressions and being bruised for our iniquities, not to his healing of physical infirmities that were characteristic of His earthly ministry. In fact, God leaves every believer in a mortal corrupt body that will not forsake its mortality or its corruption until the moment of the rapture (I Corinthians 15:51-54) in which the physical bodies of the saints will be redeemed (Romans 8:23). All believers groan in their physical bodies while they wait for this wonderful event (Romans 8:18-23; II Corinthians 5:1-4). Thus even the remarkable Apostle Paul could not escape physical infirmity in this life (II Corinthians 12:7-10).

Sudden eruptions of emotion and bizarre physical activity so characteristic of revivalism is no where to be found in Scripture unless you take into account the overt reactions against the preaching of the Gospel. True Gospel preaching leads to repentance and confession of sin. An understanding of the nature of God leads to reverence and humility. The kind of activities that were exhibited in Nineteenth Century Revivals and that are often characteristic of modern Pentecostal services is exactly what was described as confusion in the Corinthian Church of biblical times and which was dismissed as not possibly coming from God.

Finally, the Bible clearly teaches that the miracle activities characteristic of the early church was not intended to be continued throughout the life of the Church, nor does Scripture ever say it would be revived in the latter times of the Church age. I Corinthians 13:8 says there would come a time when the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge would cease to be used by the Church. Verse 10 specifies that this time would be marked by the completion of the written Word of God. The use of tongues were intended as a sign to unbelieving Jews that the Gospel of Christ was real (I Corinthians 14:22) and the Corinthians were reprimanded for using them for personal gratification and for allowing them to cause confusion in worship (I Corinthians 14:4 and 33). In addition, the working of miracles was a special gift to the Apostles to confirm the

validity of their new revelation to the people of God (Hebrews 2:4). Once these tasks were accomplished, legitimate miracle working ceased. Since the beginning of the Second Century, there have been several incidents of tongues speaking and miracle working attributed to the Holy Spirit, but in each case these activities occurred among people who were clearly heretics as far as the Bible is concerned.

Because of the evangelical Gospel which Pentecostals preach and because of their adherence to some fundamental biblical doctrines, many Christians have changed their minds about associating with people who participate in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and now consider them partners in the cause of Christ. There is reason, however, to question the compatibility of Pentecostals with true Bible believers. If an individual who belongs to a Pentecostal Church has heard the truth of the Word and has been saved on that basis, then he is truly a born-again Christian; but the message of Pentecostalism has great potential of communicating another gospel which does not result in genuine salvation. Pentecostalism leads people to seek a physical experience and then to consider themselves to be right with God because of what they have experienced. In such a scenario, there is a real possibility that the seeker will miss the truth of the Gospel altogether. No where in the Bible does God tell us a physical experience is the evidence of any spiritual reality. In fact, God's message to mankind is that salvation is based solely on what He did **for** us in Christ, and not on any additional work He does **in** us when we receive Christ. Jesus Himself emphatically stated that a person experiences spiritual deliverance when he **knows** the truth and the Word of God testifies that a person is saved when he believes the Gospel.

Dependence on a physical experience is a great deceiver of many sincere people. It is sad to think that so many could be so close to the truth, holding copies of the very Word of God in their hands, yet be so far away from God, because those who have interpreted it for them have never seen the truth themselves. If we are to be right with God, there is no substitute for a simple faith in the Word of God. In fact, everything we possess as a child of God depends solely on God's capacity to keep His promises, and nothing else.📖

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The United Church of Christ And The Churches of Christ

Denominationalism began at the very outset of the Reformation. This was because the Protestants, who together saw the doctrinal and practical corruptions of the Roman Catholic church, disagreed among themselves as to the solutions. At first there were only a few denominations such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans and the Anabaptists. But in time these groups divided and other groups emerged resulting in a profusion of denominations, each establishing some distinction for itself from all the rest.

In the latter part of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th century, there was a stirring of some Christian hearts against denominationalism. This consisted of the desire to do away with sectarian labels, the hope of returning the church to its first century condition in which all followers of Christ were simply known as Christians, and the belief that man-made creeds should be eliminated and the Bible alone followed for faith and practice. In America, this arose in several different places independently and simultaneously.

As noble as the original intention might have been, the result was simply the beginning of several new denominations. Of these, two stand out today: the Churches of Christ (some of which are also known as The Christian Church or Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ.

The United Church of Christ

1. Its History

The roots of the United Church of Christ come from four denominations. Each of these had been characterized by a desire to do away with denominational lines or at least to cooperate across them.

The Congregational Church

One of the outgrowths of the Reformation was a movement called Congregationalism. This was the idea that a local group of believers had the right to worship and live in free association with each other and to govern themselves apart from any overseeing body. Congregationalism was born in England and was carried to America in the 17th Century by the Pilgrims who settled at Plymouth and the Puritans who settled along the Massachusetts coast line. The Pilgrims and Puritans quickly joined hands and Congregationalism was firmly established in the new world. By the middle of the 19th Century, independently operating Congregational churches all over America began joining together into councils in order to organize their efforts at cooperation. A national council was officially organized in 1871 and called the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches. This union, though, was more a fellowship in function than a denomination since each local church maintained its autonomy.

The spirit of cooperation existed not only between these local Congregational Churches, but between them and other denominations as well. Their doctrine consisted of Reformed Theology, comparable to that believed and taught by the Presbyterians. As a result, there was considerable cooperation between these two groups. But the spirit of cooperation extended even further. The Council in 1913 adopted a statement of wider fellowship which says:

While affirming the liberty of our churches, and the validity of our ministry, we hold to the unity and catholicity of the Church of Christ, and will unite with all its branches in hearty cooperation; and will earnestly seek, so far as in us lies, that the prayer of our Lord for his disciples may be answered that they all may be one.

The Christian Church

The Christian Church was a distinctively American Church arising from the spirit of freedom encouraged by the Revolution. It began as three separate groups originating completely independently of each other. In 1793, James O'Kelly and 19 other ministers in North Carolina left the Methodist Church over the issue of the autocratic rule of the bishops. They first called themselves Republican Methodists, but later settled on calling themselves Christians in an attempt to eliminate the impression of sectarianism. In 1801, Abner Jones of Vermont left the Baptists because he did not believe that immersion was the only acceptable form of baptism and because he did not believe in closing communion to only the immersed. He named his new church the First Free Church of Christ in New England. He was soon joined by Elias Smith and together they started several churches. This group also generally referred to themselves as Christians in a spirit of non-sectarianism. In 1804 in Kentucky, Barton W. Stone and a total of fifteen congregations left the

Presbyterian Church over differences concerning the manner of conversion. Some of the phenomenon of charismatic-like revivals had been experienced in their churches which was contrary to the typical practices of Calvinists. When one of Stone's associates was accused of heresy in regard to these things, the group withdrew and formed a separate Presbytery. The Presbytery was dissolved just one year later, though, in an effort to free themselves from sectarianism; and in this spirit they called their congregations Christian Churches.

In a short time, these groups crossed paths and by 1808 had decided to work together. Each had rejected the use of sectarian names and elected to call themselves Christians. Each had rejected some rigid tenet of their respective denominations and adopted a freer interpretation of Scripture. It was this spirit of freedom, and not necessarily the things they believed, that made them compatible. By 1820, they had established a national convention of Christian Churches. In 1832, the group in Kentucky separated itself and joined with a fourth group arising in Pennsylvania which would eventually become the Churches of Christ discussed later in this article.

The Reformed Church In the United States

Many people who were part of the Reformed Church in Germany migrated to Pennsylvania in the early 18th century. They carried their faith with them, and began conducting religious services wherever they settled. John Philip Boehm is credited with nurturing many of these churches and helping them become well established. Michael Schlatter, who came to America in the 1740's, then brought these churches together into an organization. Initially it was called the Reformed Ministerium of the Congregations of Pennsylvania; and before the Revolution, it functioned under the jurisdiction of the Reformed Church of Holland. This relationship was severed, however, after the War and the Reformed Church became completely independent in 1793. The Reformed Church moved west into Ohio where a separate synod was organized in the 1820's. Then in 1863, the Pennsylvania and Ohio Synods joined together to form the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States. Influences of revivalism and pietism in the early part of the 19th Century ultimately fostered a spirit of ecumenism within the Reformed Church. This was particularly encouraged by the "Mercersburg Review," a publication started at Marshall College in 1848.

The Evangelical Synod

The Evangelical Synod finds its roots in German Pietism. In less than 150 years after the Reformation, the Lutheran Church in Germany had grown cold and academic. Philip Jacob Spener of Frankfurt initiated a change in 1670 that would restore vitality to the lives of many of these Christians. He held Bible studies and prayer meetings in his home and encouraged the people to be more devoted and pious in their practice of Christianity. As Pietism grew there were some side effects which would later facilitate an ecumenical spirit. These included an emphasis on good works as the expression of true religion and an indifference to doctrine. Another factor which encouraged a spirit of ecumenism occurred in 1817 when Frederick William III brought Lutherans and Calvinists together in Prussia forming the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union. From 1830 to 1845, many Germans migrated to America to escape the unsettled conditions in Europe. Some of them settled in the east, but a good portion of them traveled to the Midwestern states and settled in the upper Mississippi Valley. With assistance from several missions societies, churches were quickly established among them. The name Evangelical (similar to the word Protestant at the time) was chosen as a generic label for these churches to avoid the appearance of being sectarian. In this spirit of openness, Lutherans and Calvinists were joined together in these Evangelical Churches as they had been some years before in Prussia. In 1840 a small group of ministers started a fellowship in St. Louis which grew into the Evangelical Synod of the West. In 1872 this group joined with the Evangelical Synod of the East forming the Evangelical Synod of North America.

The United Church of Christ

The Congregational Church and The Christian Church merged in 1926 forming the Congregational Christian Churches. The Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States merged in 1934 forming the Evangelical Reformed Church. Then in 1957, the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical Reformed Church merged forming the United Church of Christ.

In all of this background, there is one unifying theme: the ecumenical spirit of cooperation. In its own words,

The United Church of Christ is a *united* and a *uniting* church. Each of the communions forming the United Church of Christ was a combination of groups which formerly existed as separate denominations. Hence, church union and unity are in the blood stream of our people.

United Church of Christ, History and Program, page 3

2. Its Doctrine

The United Church of Christ might be better described by its absence of dogma than by what it really believes. It has a statement of faith, but this is considered only a testimony and is not binding in any way upon its members. There is no requirement that participants agree with what their statement of faith says.

Do not ask, at first, whether you agree with all of it or not; but let it simply stir your interest and kindle your imagination. Then, when you are next invited to join in saying it in public worship, the Statement of Faith will come to have for you the worth and meaning that it was designed to provide.

United Church of Christ, History and Program, page 39.

Every member is free to follow his own set of beliefs.

As individual members, we are free to believe and act in accordance with our perception of God's will for our lives....There is no centralized authority or hierarchy that can impose any doctrine or form of worship on its members.

United Church of Christ Web Site, October, 1998: www.ucc.org

This statement of faith does not read like a typical doctrinal statement and cannot be understood by a literal interpretation of its words. The United Church believes that every generation of the church should "re-think and then re-phrase its faith." Furthermore, it insists that what the Church fathers taught is irrelevant today. What they believed was fine for them, but what Christians believe today must be decided for themselves. Thus they seek

an affirmation of our own which sets forth what being Christian means to us and not to some long-past time.

The current statement of faith for the United Church is merely this generation's way of expressing itself.

Some day it too will be out of date, but right now it is the latest, freshest affirmation of our common belief.

United Church of Christ, History and Program, Pages 37-39

The Bible and The Holy Spirit

The United Church of Christ does not believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. To them, the Bible is only one of many ways in which God has expressed Himself throughout history. God's expression of Himself to man is merely "epitomized in the Scriptures." Thus when the United Church refers to God's Word being spoken in the Scriptures, it means God has spoken through the vehicle of the Bible but not in the plain sense of the language of the Bible. To know what God has actually said, His Word must be mined out of the Bible through the techniques of literary criticism. The Bible must be examined by experts in history, language, archaeology, and the sacred books of other religions, in order to weed out all the things which are not the Word of God and to understand what God's current message is to the Church.

The United Church of Christ does not regard the writers of the Bible as having been protected supernaturally from reporting events erroneously or setting forth inadequate and untrue philosophies. It is said in the Book of Joshua (10:12-13), for instance, that: *Joshua...said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still....and the sun stood still... and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since.* This is plainly folklore, most interesting to any hearer, but imaginative beyond the limits which a modern historian would impose upon himself.

The United Church of Christ, page 49

Take the Christmas story in Luke, for example....there are few adult members of the United Church of Christ who believe that angels, such as the medieval artists were fond of depicting, actually appeared from heaven and talked in Aramaic with a group of shepherds about the birth in the stable. What then is to be done with the story? Some denominations take the attitude that the fathers knew better than we, and that the story should be accepted as part of the belief of the church although we cannot believe it as individual Christians. This seems like an invitation to schizophrenia....The United Church of Christ holds affectionately to the

Lucan account...but in any moment of reflection carefully distinguishes between the true kernel of the story and the elaborations of devoted fancy.

The United Church of Christ, Page 80

To the United Church of Christ, the Bible only contains the Word of God in a vague way. It teaches that God uses the Bible to communicate His Word in a fresh way to each new generation. Thus the words contained in the Bible are not important. It only matters how God uses those words to enlighten those who happen to be reading them.

There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God's holy word...The study of the scriptures is not limited by past interpretations, but it is pursued with expectancy for new insight and help for living today.

UCC Web Site

The Holy Spirit then becomes important to the discovery of what God is saying through the Bible. The Holy Spirit does not appear to be a distinct person. He is instead referred to as "the name we give to God when he comes to us in this way." (Page 50). What way is that? That is any experience in life which one "feels" has "been caused by the direct hand of God." Such experiences result in "the glow of the soul," a phrase not taken from Scripture, but from a playwright, yet equated with a Latin phrase out of church history -- "the *testimonium Sancti Spiritus internum*" or the testimony (witness) of the Holy Spirit within. So how may a man know what God is saying through the Bible? As he critically analyzes the Bible, God (i.e. the Holy Spirit) will touch a man's mind and the resulting illumination, or glow of his soul, will indicate to the man what God is saying. This is a very free and subjective method of discovering God's Word contained within the Bible. It obviously leaves revelation open ended and results in a wide variety of interpretations.

The Purpose of the Church

The United Church of Christ is the very essence of ecumenism. It rejects the notion that any group of Christians should separate themselves for any purpose including such things as "a common tradition, a common interpretation of the Bible, (or) a common creed." Neither does it seek to draw any lines of distinction between itself and other churches.

That they may all be one. This motto of the United Church of Christ reflects the spirit of unity on which it is based and points toward future efforts to heal the divisions in the body of Christ. We are a uniting church as well as a united church. **In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity.** The unity that we seek requires neither an uncritical acceptance of any point of view, nor rigid formulation of doctrine....By God's grace, we will be an inclusive church. We commit ourselves to be a church for all people and, in Christ, we celebrate, affirm, and embrace the rich diversity of God's good creation.

UCC Web Site

In the spirit of non-sectarianism, the United Church of Christ claims its purpose perfectly reflects the purpose of the real church -- that is, the Church of Jesus Christ in general. To support this, it shows how its purpose corresponds to the purpose of the World Council of Churches. This purpose is clearly social in nature and is applied to the whole society of man, not just to the Christian community.

In the realm of service, the purpose of the United Church is equally clear. It is dedicated *not* narrowly to meeting human need only where there is hope of increasing the population of the church, but to meeting human need without asking further questions, simply because it is human need.

The United Church of Christ Page 43

Christ, the Head of the Church

The United Church of Christ nobly acknowledges that Jesus Christ alone is the head of the church. But this belief then becomes the catalyst for ecumenism. To them, calling oneself a Christian is the same thing as acknowledging the headship of Christ, so that they accept a kinship to all Christians including Catholics.

Because Roman Catholics, too, lift up Christ as the sole head of the church, the United Church of Christ approaches them not as old enemies but as brethren with whom Christ can

make all things new. And so the United Church of Christ looks toward the Eastern Orthodox church and to all other churches which profess and call themselves Christian.

The United Church of Christ page 46

Man's Relationship With God

The whole basis of man's relationship with God is love. Christ's coming and sacrifice on the cross is primarily a demonstration of the love God has for mankind and the love He intends for men to have for each other. Love is superior to obedience because flawless obedience is impossible but love is the essence of our connection to God. Through the New Testament,

God conveyed to the race the knowledge that at the heart of his justice there is love, and that what he most desires is to have his love accepted and carried by every man to all men, and by all men to every man.

The United Church of Christ, Page 55

Man is connected to God's love by a Covenant. This is a universal covenant that has existed since the beginning of time and today is the same in substance as the covenant enjoyed by Israel in the Old Testament. This covenant of love is "a vehicle of life" and is directed to man both directly from God and indirectly through man's experience in the world and his interaction in human society.

The Covenant is a vehicle of life....It is a relationship in which life is imparted by God through individuals to their society and through their society to them. Society and individuals pass it to each other from generation to generation.

The United Church of Christ, Page 57

The Sacraments

Since it is believed that God in large part directs Himself to man through his human experience, it follows that He would certainly do so through baptism and the Lord's Supper, the two sacraments acknowledged by the United Church of Christ. Baptism is thus viewed as the "rite of initiation into Christ's church."

The total rite comes to mean that the person baptized is thereby adopted into the new life which is hid with Christ, and Christ's people, in God.

The United Church of Christ, Page 90

All modes of baptism are accepted, including a form of spiritual baptism for those who object to being baptized with water. The baptism of all churches is acknowledged so that anyone who has been baptized in any church, including Catholic churches, is welcomed as a member of the church.

The Lord's supper is also a vehicle through which a person receives the grace of God. This is based on the belief that Christ's real presence exists in both the bread and the wine. As with baptism, there are no restrictions with regard to participation in communion.

The Churches of Christ

1. Its History

For the roots of the Churches of Christ, we return to the background of one of the four groups that formed the United Church of Christ. The group that followed Barton W. Stone in Kentucky had become part of the Christian Church along with the groups from North Carolina and New England. But Stone had also come into contact with another free spirited group in Pennsylvania under the leadership of Thomas and Alexander Campbell. This would facilitate a brief association between the Campbellites and the Christian Churches, but the doctrine of baptismal regeneration would prevent them from becoming one.

In 1807, Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian minister, moved from northern Ireland to Pennsylvania. The Presbyterian Synod in session at Philadelphia assigned Mr. Campbell to a Seceder Presbyterian church in Washington County. Campbell soon manifested some serious differences with the Presbyterians and was censured by the Synod. Nevertheless, he continued to preach and formed the Christian Association of Washington. At first, Campbell wanted his association to be recognized as part of the Presbyterian church, but when the denomination rejected this idea, he formulated the association into an independent church.

There were two things about which Thomas Campbell was most concerned: the unity of the church in place of denominationalism, and the use of the Bible alone apart from creeds. He, like those who had formed the Christian Churches, wanted to do away with denominationalism. He thought the church should return to its first century condition and be one entity in which all its members were merely known as Christians. He also wanted to do away with the doctrinal differences which followed denominational lines. The factor that made it unlikely he would ever accomplish his goal was his conviction that his own beliefs were infallible and that the whole church of Christ should follow him. His invitation to others to follow only the teachings of the Bible rather than denominational creeds really meant that he wanted everyone to accept his personal interpretation of the Bible. His quest for Christian unity was clearly self-serving and not very appealing.

In 1810, Thomas' son, Alexander, joined him from Scotland and soon became very influential in this work. Thomas was a mild-mannered man in many respects and though he claimed infallibility for his beliefs, he did not possess the personal strength to command a large following. His son, however, was just the person to do so. Alexander was strong willed and cantankerous. It was he that would draw attention to the new group and generate its ultimate growth.

In the beginning, the Campbell's church was small and could hardly survive on its own. So in 1813, they sought and gained acceptance into the Redstone Association of Baptists; and they continued as part of this Association until 1823. However, the Campbells were teaching some very unorthodox doctrines and many of the Baptists realized the Campbells were not like them at all. In 1823, the Redstone Association prepared to excommunicate Alexander Campbell for heresy. Learning of their plan and not wanting the stigma of such a thing hindering his public image, he devised a plan to avoid it. Using part of his church at Brush Run that belonged to the Baptist Association, he started a separate church which was not part of the Association and moved his personal membership to that new church. By doing so, he was no longer a member of the Association and thus could not be excommunicated. When the Baptists assembled for the proceedings, Alexander revealed his actions to the council and walked out an untainted man.

The ensuing spread of the Churches of Christ is directly attributable to the cantankerous spirit of Alexander Campbell. His father did not approve of debating doctrine in public, but Alexander was very skilled in the arts of arguing and became convinced that public debates were much more profitable than preaching. Had it not been for these debates, the Campbells might well have been confined to one congregation and no movement at all. But through these debates, Alexander drew a lot of attention to his movement.

Eventually, baptism became the dominant issue for the Churches of Christ. Infant baptism had been part of the Campbells' Presbyterian background, but they became convinced that Biblical baptism was only for believing adults and should be by immersion. In June of 1812, five members of the Campbell family and two others were publicly immersed by a Baptist minister. At this time there was no thought in their minds that baptism had any part in saving a man, and it was this adoption of immersion that had convinced the Baptists to welcome the Campbells into their association. However, as time passed, Alexander, his father, Thomas, and another man named Walter Scott spent much time studying the Bible and discussing the role baptism had in salvation. They finally came to the conclusion that baptism was indeed necessary in order for a person to be saved.

Alexander began presenting this notion in his public debates. At first it was not a clear issue, but in 1827 in a debate with a Presbyterian named W. L. McCalla, Campbell said that baptism was intended as a "pledge of remission of sins." A follower of the Campbells, Adamson Bentley, soon afterwards said in a discourse that baptism was "a remitting institution." Walter Scott then translated this new doctrine (which the Campbellites considered a restoration of the ancient Gospel) into a tangible application. Scott had set down the elements of the Gospel in a progressive order: first a man had to have faith, then he repented, then he was baptized, then his sins were remitted, and after that he received the Holy Spirit. He preached this in a sermon in November of 1827 and for the first time gave an invitation for his listeners to come and be baptized for the remission of sins. One man responded to this unusual invitation and was immediately baptized by Mr. Scott. In just a few months, Scott convinced hundreds of others to do the same.

In the meantime, Barton Stone in Kentucky had spontaneously suggested the notion of baptismal regeneration to his congregation. The emotional elements of the revival movement were a dominant factor in Stone's group and the idea of being baptized for salvation was received rather coldly. He quickly laid the notion aside. But in 1826, another preacher reintroduced this doctrine to Stone's group and a few responded to it. This opened the door to a closer association with the Campbellites. In 1832, a formal union occurred between the two groups, but it consisted more of the Campbellite group absorbing Stone's group than anything else.

When Stone and his followers in Kentucky joined the Campbells of Pennsylvania, the other parts of the Christian Church movement in New England and North Carolina went their own way. There were two factors that caused this: one was a strong element of Unitarianism in the New England group, and the other was differences concerning baptism. The Christian Church ultimately ended up in the United Church of Christ as discussed earlier. The Kentucky and Pennsylvania groups became the beginning of the Churches of Christ.

Through the years there have been numerous divisions among the Churches of Christ. The most notable occurred between 1870 and 1890. During those years some of the churches helped to organize the American Missionary Society. At the same time they began using musical instruments in their services. The conservatives objected to both of these things. It ended up that the conservative churches used the name Church of Christ, while the more progressive ones called themselves either Disciples of Christ or The Christian Church.

2. Its Doctrine

In a true flavor of non-sectarianism, the Churches of Christ have no doctrinal statement but claim that the Bible is itself their doctrinal statement.

As to our creed...we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and as Saviour. Our book of doctrine, or list of beliefs, is simply the Word of God. Thus as one man has expressed it, "We have no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the name Christian."

Pamphlet, What do You Mean Restoration Movement, by Robert Mallett

The Church of Christ is the True Church

The movement of the Churches of Christ refers to itself as the Restoration Movement. This is because they believe they have restored the true Church as it was in the first century and the true Gospel as originally believed in the beginning. The true church they say was undenominational and believed that salvation was through water baptism. As such, the Churches of Christ do not consider themselves to be a denomination, but the representation of the true church in its original form.

The leaders of the Restoration Movement started nothing, but rather RESTORED the Lord's church by preaching the true Gospel (Luke 8:11,15)...Therefore the Restoration Plea is right, and there is no doubt that we constitute the church of the Lord.

The Restoration Movement by Bob L. Ross, Page 27 - Quoting Garland Elkans, July 1974

Why do we insist that the church of Christ is not a denomination? Simply because this church was and is essentially undenominational in nature, having no central or earthly headquarters, no human creed, and no official organization such as denominations maintain. The church of Christ is not a new church. It is as old as the first century. It was born on the Day of Pentecost....Thomas and Alexander Campbell did not found a new church. They simply restored the old.

Pamphlet, Why I Belong to The Church of Christ by Claude A. Doyle

Baptism

The predominant doctrine of the Churches of Christ, however, is baptismal regeneration. Alexander Campbell developed this doctrine to its extreme, teaching that immersion under water is "the act of conversion" by which a person's sins are forgiven and by which he is born again. The verses of Scripture he based this on included John 3:5, Mark 16:16, Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:27, I Peter 3:21, and especially Acts 2:38. Acts 2:38 says in part, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*" Mr. Campbell and his followers taught that the word "for" in this verse means "in order to." With that, they insisted that a man must be baptized in order to receive the remission of sins.

The only mode of baptism they use is immersion. This was at the root of both Alexander Campbell's and Barton Stone's evolving views. Both had been brought up under a system which used infant baptism. Through the study of the Scripture, both became convinced that immersion was what the Bible taught. They forsook infant baptism and adopted a view which insisted that baptism was by immersion and that it was only for adults who understood what they were doing.

While it is true that the Churches of Christ teach that faith and repentance come before water baptism, they also teach that faith is dead until a person is baptized. J.W. McGarvey said in his commentary on Acts, page 210,

If faith without works is dead, then it remains dead as long as it remains without works. It thus remains until the believer is immersed, if he proceed according to apostolic example; therefore, faith without immersion is dead.

The Restoration Movement by Ross, Page 52

Thus the Churches of Christ teach that baptism is the work of obedience that gives life to faith. Without baptism, therefore, faith is worthless; and without baptism, a person is not saved.

Rebuttals

The United Church of Christ

Ecumenism is not Biblical. It requires that doctrine be set aside in deference to unity based on love. The Word of God, however, is abundantly clear on the importance of distinguishing between sound doctrine and false doctrine. Timothy was left in Ephesus to “*charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith*” (I Timothy 1:3-4). Titus was left in Crete to stop the mouth of vain talkers “*who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not*” (Titus 1:10-11). The Corinthians were warned against being corrupted by those who preach another Jesus, offer another spirit, or present another Gospel (II Corinthians 11:3-4). The Galatians were rebuked for being so soon removed into another gospel, which was not actually another gospel but was, in fact, a perversion of the true gospel (Galatians 1:6-7). The Colossians were warned against being beguiled into false forms of worship which were contrary to Christ (Colossians 3:18-23). The Thessalonians were turned away from false teachings concerning the day of Christ (II Thessalonians 2:2). Nearly every New Testament Letter calls attention to false doctrine being brought into the church and to the importance of being separated from such error. Repeatedly, those who are sound in the faith are admonished to guard against and turn away from false teachers and their false doctrines (II Corinthians 11:12-13; I Timothy 4:1-7; II Peter 2:1ff; I John 4:1ff).

If a church holds that no doctrine is binding on its members and no doctrine will be used as a test of faith, there is no means within that church to protect against false doctrine. This is, of course, the fallacy of ecumenism and the error of the United Church of Christ.

The Churches of Christ

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Water baptism has absolutely nothing to do with a person obtaining salvation. It is only symbolic, a testimony of what has already occurred in the life of a person who has professed faith in Christ.

Regarding Acts 2:38, the key word in understanding its intent is the word “for.” This word can have several connotations. It can mean “in order to obtain” as in the sentence, “I will give you a dollar for that book.” In this case an exchange is being made. A person receives a book in exchange for a dollar bill. If the word “for” is used in this sense in Acts 2:38, then God is saying, “Be baptized in exchange for, or in order to obtain, the remission of sins.” However, the word “for” may also mean “because of” or “in honor of” as in the sentence, “He received the prize for having the best score.” In this case, the best score was achieved first and then a prize was awarded because of, or in honor of, what was already accomplished. If the word “for” is used in this sense in Acts 2:38, then God is saying “Be baptized because of, or in honor of, the fact that you have already experienced the remission of sins. The latter is, in fact, the sense in which God uses the word “for” in this verse. Acts 2:38 teaches that a person ought to repent of his sins and receive Christ as his Savior whereby his sins are forgiven. He then ought to be baptized for, because of, or in honor of, the remission of sins he has already received. Thus it does not teach baptismal regeneration.

A similar explanation can be given for every verse that seems to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. In some cases the word is referring to spiritual baptism, in which the Holy Spirit is placing a believer into the body of Christ after he has been saved (Romans 6:3; I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). In other cases the word is referring to water baptism which is merely a testimony of the believer’s relationship to Christ and His work (Acts 19:3-5; I Corinthians 1:13-17). In no case does the Word of God ever suggest that water baptism is the means by which a man’s sins are remitted or by which a man is born again.

Conclusion

Both the United Church of Christ and the Churches of Christ claim to be the true church of Christ, unfettered by sectarianism, functioning solely under the headship of Christ, and following the Bible alone for its understanding of truth. Both groups started out very much the same and have continued to use some very similar terminology in describing themselves. But each has adopted particular characteristics which definitely sets it apart from other groups and makes it clearly identifiable as just another denomination.

It is too bad, really. It would be nice to do away with denominationalism and to have all Christians together under the headship of Christ, following the Bible alone as their rule for faith and practice. Unfortunately, the vast differences in doctrine and practice between the existing denominations make this impossible; and the histories of the United Church of Christ and the Churches of Christ teach us that starting new denominations is not the means by which this will be accomplished. For now, denominationalism is important in order to maintain an awareness of how differently Christians believe. These lines of distinction then help in deciphering what is sound doctrine and what is false in light of Scripture. When Jesus comes, all this will be resolved. In the meantime, we must hold fast the form of sound words and be diligent in our study of the Word of God striving as best we can to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in rightly dividing the Word of truth. If possible, we may conduct civil dialogs with those of different doctrinal persuasions in the hope of coming to a joint understanding of genuine Scriptural truth. Apart from such agreement on what we believe, we ought to maintain the walls which clarify our differences. 📖

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The Brethren Churches and The Plymouth Brethren

The word “brethren” is used over 150 times in the New Testament in reference to those who are born again and part of the Body of Christ. It was only natural that some Christians along the way would choose this term as a title for their church. In fact, this has happened several times so that Brethren Churches have many different roots and exist today in many different denominations. Some Brethren churches came out of non-Brethren denominations such as the Mennonite Brethren and the Lutheran Brethren. Others are the result of divisions among the primary groups that were historically Brethren. For the sake of this study, we will examine several sets of roots to Brethren churches and the denominations that resulted from them. These include The German Baptist Brethren, the River Brethren, The United Brethren, and the Plymouth Brethren. It should be noted that the Plymouth Brethren have a completely distinct background from other Brethren groups and do not share some of the typical Brethren distinctives. For this reason, the Plymouth Brethren are considered in a separate section at the end of this chapter.

Histories of Brethren Churches

The German Baptist Brethren

Several Brethren denominations commonly point to a definite beginning in 1708 when Alexander Mack and some of his friends began meeting for prayer and Bible study in Schwarzenau, Germany. After the Thirty Years War ended in 1648, only Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Churches were given permission to operate in the German States in accordance with the Treaty of Westphalia. A cold formalism had set into the Protestant denominations and some wished to pursue alternatives. Under the restrictions of the treaty this would have been nearly impossible, but Prince Henry of Wittgenstein refused to cooperate with the treaty and allowed dissenters the freedom to assemble in his realm. These factors gave Mack and his followers the cause and opportunity to begin afresh according to their own convictions.

This group of Brethren churches also points to a diligent search of the Scriptures as an important factor in their beginning. Initially, they had some association with the Pietist movement. But Mack considered the Pietists to be too indefinite about doctrine. He himself had a strong conviction about the inspiration of the Scriptures and their importance to the believer. Truth was more important to him than experience. Thus, at the outset, a deep devotion to sound doctrine was at the very heart of the German Baptist brethren movement.

At first, they were labeled the Tunkers, or Dunkers, because of the manner in which they baptized. They had rejected infant baptism, as did the Anabaptists, and replaced it with immersion for adult believers. But while the Anabaptists immersed one time backwards, these brethren dunked professing believers three times forward. Also, Mack taught his followers that there was absolutely no connection between baptism and salvation. “Salvation,” he said, “is not in water, but alone through faith which worketh obedience through love” (Conquering Frontiers page 31).

The young church (generally known as German Baptists until 1883) would not last long in Europe, but would soon move almost entirely to America. The stronghold of the mainline denominations caused considerable persecution from both state and church officials. At the same time, William Penn was seeking settlers for his colony and, knowing the difficulties these brethren were experiencing, invited them to settle in Pennsylvania. The first group arrived in 1719 and settled around Germantown. At first, they did not meet together for worship. They merely settled as individuals in the same general area. Then, in the early 1720's a young man by the name of Conrad Beissel came to America and circulated among these brethren. From his influence, they began meeting together and organized into a church. This was greatly strengthened in 1729 when Alexander Mack brought more than 50 families to Pennsylvania.

Beissel was not really compatible with these brethren, so he withdrew around 1730 taking a following with him and establishing the **Ephrata Cloister**. This was a monastic group which worshiped on the Seventh Day, followed the law and the ten commandments more than grace, promoted celibacy over marriage which was regarded as “the penitentiary of carnal man,” and taught that “seclusion from the world is the surest means of attaining to holiness.” This group did not last much beyond the life time of Conrad Beissel but is an interesting footnote in American religious history.

German Baptist churches were only loosely associated until 1742. In that year, Count Zinzendorf attempted to put a coalition of churches together, including the Tunkers (Dunkards), Lutherans, German Reformed, Mennonites and Moravians. The leaders of the Tunkers, however, were afraid that such a union would have an adverse effect upon the brethren leading them away from the simple life their churches had established and back into some doctrinal error they had previously left behind. So in that same year an annual conference of the German Baptists churches was established in order to preserve their distinctives.

The American Revolution created another problem for them because of their belief that Christians should not go to war or take oaths. As the military conflict drew nearer, the colonial government of Pennsylvania required all its citizen to pledge allegiance to the colony or declare themselves to be loyalists. The brethren responded in three ways. Some left the movement and became loyalists. Some stayed in Pennsylvania, enduring considerable persecution for their refusal to take a position. Others remained faithful to their convictions but left Pennsylvania. This was actually good for the movement carrying the Brethren cause south and west across the continent.

In the first half of the Nineteenth Century the brethren fell into some habits that cultivated a tendency to legalism. This was particularly manifested by a uniformity in dress designed to avoid identification with vain fashions, a forsaking of education which was considered a pathway to worldliness, and a rejection of singing harmonic parts which was thought to be of the flesh. At first, the motive was noble, being an attempt to show a distinction between themselves and the world. The result, however, was an emerging view of salvation that was legalistic in nature.

In the second half of the Century, the tide changed. Periodicals began to be published for the denomination, education became more important, Sunday Schools were started, and an interest in world wide missions arose.

This resulted in a division of the brethren which culminated in 1881-1883 when the group went three separate ways. The conservatives maintained the status quo and retained the name **German Baptists**. The ultra-conservatives withdrew and formed the **Old German Baptist Brethren**. The third group was the progressive faction, which had encouraged the innovations of printed matter, education and missionary interests. In 1883 they officially organized as **The Brethren Church**. Each of these groups considered themselves to be the continuation of the historic brethren movement as started by Alexander Mack.

The German Baptists changed their name in 1908 to **The Church of the Brethren**. This group consisted mostly of farmers who moved all over the country and settled mainly in rural areas. It was only in the middle of the 20th Century that some moved into urban areas. The Church of the Brethren became very socially conscious through the years and in 1940 organized the Brethren Service Committee. It has emphasized the building of schools, hospitals, and a variety of programs which help the poor and needy.

The Old German Baptist Brethren remained a very small group. They maintained ultra-conservative values which downplayed education, promoted a strict lifestyle and emphasized the traditional Dunkard distinctives.

The Brethren Church was progressive in practice and polity but not in doctrine, maintaining the same strong convictions that their founders had established. They wanted to be well organized, well taught, and aggressively evangelistic, but they did not want to compromise their beliefs. On the one hand, they gave freedom to each of their local churches to decide upon the incidentals of day to day operations, but on the other hand they allowed no freedom for doctrinal divergence. The Brethren Church had an heritage of biblical orthodoxy and they were determined to preserve it.

This strong position on doctrine would eventually be tested through circumstances surrounding Ashland College in Ashland, Ohio. The Brethren Church adopted a statement of faith in 1921 to clarify their beliefs. About this same time, Alva J. McClean was called upon to start a graduate level seminary in conjunction with Ashland College. The leadership of the college had adopted a more open philosophy regarding doctrine, associations, and policies in contradiction to stated Brethren policy. Brother McClean and the Seminary remained solidly on the Brethren position. This conflict came to a head in 1937 when the College Board dismissed Alva J. McClean and A. J. Hoyt supposedly for being uncooperative. The conservatives rallied behind these men and founded Grace Theological Seminary as a separate Brethren institution. There ensued a polarization of the Brethren churches because of their opposing positions regarding these two schools. Then in 1939, the Ashland group being in control of the annual Conference refused to seat many of the delegates who were supporters of Grace Seminary. The Grace group met anyway in another location and decided to form a separate fellowship. At first, they called themselves **The National Fellowship of Brethren Churches** and then later changed their name to **The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches**. The Ashland group called themselves the **General or National Conference of the Brethren Church**. In the 1990's, the Grace Brethren churches divided and a new group was formed under the name **The Conservative Grace Brethren**.

River Brethren

A much smaller group called River Brethren originated in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in the latter part of the 18th Century. Fellowship groups were formed in this area consisting of German Reformed, Anabaptists and Pietist groups. They called themselves United Brethren. A German Reformed group that met near the Susquehanna River initially participated in the United Brethren but soon withdrew over differences regarding the matter of Baptism. A man named Jacob Engel had become convinced that trine immersion was the Scriptural method for baptism, but this differed from the typical Anabaptist practice of

immersing once backwards. When the United Brethren were not receptive to this idea, the river group decided to establish a separate identity. Because of their proximity to the river they were referred to as "the Brotherhood by the River," later shortened to River Brethren. In the middle of the Nineteenth Century, this group suffered two splits which resulted in the formation of the **Old Order Brethren** in 1843 and the **United Zion Church** in 1855. The main body adopted the name **The Brethren In Christ Church** in 1863.

Most of the original members of the Old Order Brethren came from York County and are sometimes referred to as Yorker Brethren. They separated from the main body believing that a stronger stand needed to be taken on the issues of non-resistance and non-conformity to the world. They never built buildings and always met in the homes of their members.

The United Zion Church began as United Zion's Children. It was started by Bishop Matthias Brinser who had been expelled from the Brethren In Christ Church. It changed its name to the United Zion Church in 1954 and remains essentially the same in doctrine as the Brethren In Christ.

The United Brethren

The larger body from which the River Brethren separated began in the 1760's in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. At that time, a very powerful and lively spiritual movement swept the area resulting in large interdenominational gatherings, sometimes lasting several days. In one such "Great Meeting" held in 1767 near the city of Lancaster, a Mennonite named Martin Boehm spoke concerning how he had come to Christ. Attending the meeting was a German Reformed pastor named Philip Otterbein, who upon hearing Boehm's testimony, is said to have hugged him and exclaimed, "Wir sind Bruder" (we are Brethren).

Out of this came the organization of a new denomination called The United Brethren. In 1800 a conference was held in which an official name was adopted -- **Church of the United Brethren In Christ**. Martin Boehm and Philip Otterbein were selected as the first two bishops. These men perfectly complimented each other, Boehm being a short man, plain in dress and manners, and lacking confidence in his speaking ability, while Otterbein was tall, cultured, well educated, and a very confident public speaker. In 1815, a well defined doctrinal statement was adopted, based on a "Confession of Faith" written by Otterbein in 1789. This statement has never been changed.

Unlike the River Brethren groups which remained small, the United Brethren grew considerably. Many United Brethren churches appeared all over Pennsylvania and beyond into Virginia, Maryland and Ohio. Throughout the 1800's, these brethren moved across the continent and started hundreds of United Brethren churches. These were mostly rural churches and were served by untrained circuit riding preachers who would sometimes personally oversee as many as 30 churches. At first, few church buildings were erected and the meetings were held in homes, barns, schools, or outdoors. When local groups began building church structures, the leadership instructed that they be kept plain and maintain free pews.

Eventually, the denomination began establishing numerous colleges. These United Brethren institutions were very innovative. From the beginning they all included women and the Otterbein College in Ohio also opened its doors to blacks.

The United Brethren became heavily involved in the anti-slavery movement and participated in the Underground Railroad. From 1837 on, slave owners were banned from membership.

A small group led by George W. Hoffman separated from the main body in the 1860's over such matters as infant baptism, pacifism, secret societies and the manner of dress. This group officially organized in 1877 under the name of the **United Christian Church**.

There was a major split in 1889 which resulted from a desire to make changes to the constitution. The discussion involved a couple of procedural matters concerning representation at conferences and a more serious matter of granting permission for members to join lodges and secret societies. The dispute primarily focused on the process by which the constitution could be changed. A small group insisted that all 200,000 members of the local churches be given the opportunity to vote. The majority, however, voted in the changes at the annual conference. The small group then departed from the conference and declared itself to be a new **Church of the United Brethren in Christ**. The result was two groups with the same name. The larger group, which brought about the changes, merged in 1946 with the Evangelical Church forming the **Evangelical United Brethren Church**, and merged again in 1967 with The Methodist Church to form the United Methodist Church. The small group continues today under the original name.

Doctrinal Distinctive of Various Brethren Churches

Brethren Distinctives

There are several distinctives which are characteristic of most Brethren churches: (1) trine, or triune immersion for baptism which consists of dunking the person forward three times, once each in the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; (2) a three-fold communion service which begins with feet washing (considered a separate ordinance by some), continues with the love feast meal, and concludes with the Lord's Supper; (3) saluting one another with an holy kiss; (4) and, anointing the sick with oil. Many of the Brethren churches also promote a very conservative lifestyle, forbid the use of alcoholic beverages, teach against divorce and remarriage, refuse to take oaths, and are pacifist by conviction. Most Brethren groups are evangelical in doctrine, but some do not believe in eternal security.

The following are distinctives of several groups mentioned in the histories section. The first three are from German Baptist roots. The latter three are from the separate roots of the River Brethren, the United Brethren, and the Plymouth Brethren.

Old German Baptist Brethren

Alexander Mack was very definite about teaching that baptism was purely symbolic and had nothing to do with a person getting saved. A statement in the Old German Baptist Brethren doctrines seems to contradict this to some degree.

Water baptism is the initiatory rite into the church, is for believers only, and is a covenant between God and man. On the part of man it is a seal of faith in Christ and His word...on the part of God it is the seal to man of the remission of sins and of the gift of the Holy Ghost....The sinner has his heart changed by faith, his conduct by repentance, and his relation by baptism, but the pardoning act itself takes place in heaven.

American Religious Creeds, Doctrinal statement of the Old German Baptist Brethren

They also seem to include works with salvation.

We preach both Faith and Works, believing that man cannot adopt the promises of God without heeding the requirements of Grace.

They use fermented wine in communion, and have a closed communion, allowing only those who are "in sufficient union, harmony and oneness" to participate.

Their dress is severely plain and they reject worldly amusements. They do not use musical instruments in their worship and they have only congregational singing. They do not have Sunday Schools and are not highly supportive of higher education. They are strictly pacifists. Joining the military will subject a member to church discipline. They do not take oaths or participate in lawsuits. They do not believe in divorce and remarriage. They do, however, accept science as an aid to natural healing.

An annual meeting rules on matters about which the Bible speaks directly, and the decisions are binding on all members. They do not have salaried ministers or missionaries.

Church of the Brethren

There is no official statement of faith for the Church of the Brethren. Instead, they consider the whole New Testament to be their basis of doctrinal belief.

Rather than emphasizing creeds, the Brethren have emphasized living lives of faithfulness to Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament. Theologically, the Brethren share basic beliefs with other Protestants, believing in God as loving Creator, confessing Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior, and seeking to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Church of the Brethren Website: cob-net.org/

Note the emphasis on the New Testament. The Old Testament is somewhat frowned upon because of its heavy content of war, and inclusions of slavery and divorce. Their core beliefs are evangelical in nature, but they do leave the doctrinal door open.

They do not endeavor to force upon men any form of spiritual belief or intellectual understanding; rather they believe that each member should always have freedom to grow toward a fuller understanding of God and of his eternal truth.

The American church, Page 284

The individual is permitted to understand the various aspects of doctrine according to his own enlightenment and the divine guidance which he senses.

The Church of the Brethren, Page 5

They are distinctively brethren in their observance of the ordinances, including feet washing, the Lord's Supper meal, Communion, anointing the sick for healing, and the laying on of hands. They consider the ordinances to be very important to the Christian life as a tool for growing in the grace of God.

Their lifestyle is also part of their belief system. They refuse to swear or take oaths, and they avoid lawsuits. They live temperate lives, shunning luxuries such as jewelry and popular fashions. They refrain from indulging in alcoholic beverages and tobacco. They reject divorce as unbiblical. They also maintain a high level of social consciousness and concern for their fellowman.

They refer to themselves as "one of the historic peace churches along with the Quakers and the Mennonites." They are pacifist, but aggressively replace participation in war with peaceful activities and a concern for meeting social needs. Several of their organizations have become ecumenical in nature (their own description) such as Heifer Project International, Church World Service, CROP, and International Christian Youth Exchange.

The Church of the Brethren is by its own testimony ecumenical. It belongs to the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, "sharing in the financial support as well as in the work of both councils." (The Church of the Brethren, Page 16)

Grace Brethren

The Motto of the Grace Brethren Churches is "The Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible." In fact, they declare,

The National Fellowship of Brethren Churches is strictly a Bible Church. The Word of God as the Holy Spirit reveals it is our *supreme rule and authority for faith and practice*....Therefore, it is supremely important that we understand at the outset the uncompromising position of the NFBC on the whole Word of God...and that continued membership in the church is dependent upon the pastors and churches maintaining the biblical doctrinal position.

American Religious Creeds Statement of Biblical Truths, National Fellowship of Brethren Churches, page 115

A fundamentalist would be comfortable reading through the doctrines of the Grace Brethren Church. They are sound and biblical. For example, they believe in

A complete and eternal salvation by God's grace alone, received as the gift of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work.

And,

The personal, visible and imminent return of Christ to remove His Church from the earth before the Tribulation, and afterward to descend with the Church to establish His millennial kingdom upon the earth.

Grace Brethren Web site: fgbc.org

The Grace Brethren Churches are distinctively Brethren, however, in that they observe the following as ordinances: (1) baptism of believers by Triune Immersion; (2) confirmation; (3) The Lord's Supper (love feast meal); (4) The communion of the Bread and Wine; (5) the washing of the saints' feet; and (6) the anointing of the sick with oil.

The Brethren in Christ Church

The Brethren in Christ Church began under the influences of Pietists and Anabaptists. A statement of faith was established in 1780, but it has changed through the years. In the late 19th Century, the Brethren in Christ incorporated some Wesleyan beliefs into their doctrinal position. The result is that it does not believe in eternal security,

The believer's relationship of life in Christ remains secure as he exercises his own voluntary will unto yieldedness and obedience to the known will of God. To willfully disregard God's will and commandments will result in his being eternally lost.

American Religious Creeds Doctrinal statement of the Brethren in Christ Church, page 108 but it does believe in ultimate sanctification as a separate experience from Salvation.

As a Christian experience, sanctification embodies the setting apart of the believer in entire consecration, and the cleansing of the believer's heart from carnality, accompanied by the baptism of the Holy Spirit....This experience for believers is obtained instantaneously and subsequent to the new birth.

Ibid. Page 109

This denomination is a member of the Christian Holiness Association. As a Brethren Church it practices triune immersion, feet washing, and the anointing of the sick for healing.

Church of the United Brethren In Christ

The doctrinal statement of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, which is still the same as it was in 1815, is very short. It includes statements about the Triune God who is the creator; the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and His death, burial and resurrection; The Holy Spirit as comfort and guide; the Church as the communion of saints; and the Bible as the Word of God which contains the salvation message.

We believe that the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God; that it contains the only true way to our salvation; that every true Christian is bound to acknowledge and receive it with the influence of the Spirit of God as the only rule and guide; and that without faith in Jesus Christ, true repentance, forgiveness of sins, and following after Christ, no one can be a true Christian.

Confession of Faith, UB Website, ub.org/

Regarding the practice of the ordinances, they are very flexible.

We believe that the ordinances, viz. Baptism and the remembrance of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to be in use and practiced by all Christian societies; and that it is incumbent on all the children of God particularly to practice them; but the manner in which ought always to be left to the judgment and understanding of every individual. Also, the example of washing feet is left to the judgment of every one to practice or not; but it is not becoming of any of our preachers or members to traduce any of their brethren whose judgment and understanding in these respects is different from their own, either in public or in private.

Ibid.

This group labels itself conservative and evangelical. It has maintained the principle that its members may not be members of secret organizations. It forbids the use of alcoholic beverages and encourages its members to live a "strict scriptural" lifestyle. It does allow participation in defensive, but not aggressive, warfare.

Responses

There are some serious matters among the Brethren churches that definitely qualify as doctrinal error. These include such things as entire sanctification, adding works to the requirements for salvation, the belief that one can lose his salvation, and ecumenism, a critical problem which effects the integrity of biblical Christianity. Rebuttals to these positions are discussed in other chapters as they are held in common, with some variations, by several denominations. The reader may refer to those places for biblical answers concerning these matters. It is important to note, however, that not all Brethren churches subscribe to these doctrinal errors.

Other matters that are distinctively characteristic of many Brethren churches are much less significant in their nature of difference from typical Fundamentalist beliefs. To these we offer responses rather than rebuttals.

1. With regard to baptism, triune immersion is still immersion and satisfies the biblical teaching on baptism.
2. Washing the saints feet is a practice that Fundamentalists would not consider to be an ordinance; however, there would be no Scriptural reason for arguing against it if it is practiced with the intent of illustrating the biblical principle of humility. In fact, some Christians might benefit from such an experience.
3. Neither would most Fundamentalists consider the love feast meal to be part of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. This is something that would generally be discouraged because of the baggage that might accompany it as noted in I Corinthians Chapter 11. On the other hand, if well controlled, one could not say it is unbiblical.
4. Greeting one another with an holy kiss is generally done brother to brother and sister to sister while restricting brother to sister greetings to a hand shake. As such, it may have some potential for expressing a closeness in the body of Christ if properly controlled, but a hand shake all around seems sufficient to accomplish this.
5. Regarding the matter of anointing with oil, many of the Brethren do not consider it to have the magical power of instantaneously healing the sick as in the venue of modern day faith-healers. If they do, they truly misunderstand God's intentions in this regard. The Grace Brethren state clearly their belief that the oil is only symbolic and not sacramental:

The elders who have come to share in the service recognize that all healing is of the Lord, and if the sick is healed, it is not by their hands, or by the oil that they use, or even by the prayers which they pray, but by the power of the Lord conveyed through His Holy Spirit. It

also involves the fact that the elders and the sick one esteem the will of the Lord above everything else that happens. If God wills to heal, then blessed be the name of the Lord. If He chooses not to heal, then blessed be the name of the Lord, for He is the Lord of the universe.

Our Heritage: Brethren Beliefs And Practices, Page 99

However, other fundamentalists would say that the anointing with oil referred to in James 5 is regarding the application of medical treatment, and not a religious ceremony. Scriptural evidence for this includes such passages as Luke 10:34 where the Good Samaritan poured oil into the wounds of the poor man he stopped to help, and Psalm 23:5 where the shepherd anointed the head of his sheep with oil which served as a healing agent. At the same time, the James 5 passage does teach the importance of the ministry of prayer, particularly on the part of elders, on behalf of the sick.

6. Concerning the matter of passivism, Fundamentalists would not typically take this position, but would graciously respect those who do as a matter of conscience.

7. Regarding the laying on of hands, this is another matter that Fundamentalists would not consider to be an ordinance. It is practiced, however, in special situations such as the ordaining of a minister or the commissioning of a missionary.

8. As to paid ministers, I Corinthians Chapter 9 makes a clear case for those who sow spiritual things to be able to reap a material livelihood from doing so. This, of course, does not make them a separate class apart from the rest of the Body of Christ, nor is it required in order to identify a person as a minister of the Gospel.

9. Concerning plainness of dress, Fundamentalists might have something to learn from the Brethren in this matter. Most of us have become too much like the world in our physical appearance and show no difference at all in this regard. Modesty is a clear teaching of Scripture and includes both the sufficient covering of the body and a physical appearance that draws more attention to a godly character than to a beautiful exterior. As to the covering of a woman's head, which some Brethren practice, we would say that God has given a woman her hair for a covering (I Corinthians 11:15), and a small bonnet is not necessary to satisfy this principle of Scripture. We would agree, however, that in spite of feminism, it is still biblical for a woman to demonstrate submission to her husband.

10. Fundamentalists also need to take note of the strong position some Brethren still hold concerning divorce and remarriage. The Bible has not changed on this subject, but many preachers have in the last half of the 20th Century.

11. Many of the Brethren churches are very socially conscious. They diligently conduct programs designed to meet basic social needs not only of other Christians but people in general as well. If used as a tool to help the whole man, that is to present the Gospel and bring men to Christ, this type of activity cannot be criticized. If, however, it tends to the social gospel, a belief that meeting the social needs of mankind is the objective of the Gospel, then the Brethren miss the point of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Man's root problem is sin, not hunger. If we satisfy a man's physical hunger, but not his spiritual thirst, our social deeds are irrelevant.

Apart from these things, there are some important precedents to note as coming from some of the Brethren roots. The history of the Grace Brethren churches particularly, and the German Baptists in general, is a testimony of a commitment to stand on truth and not to compromise. It seems that so many denominations which emerged from the 18th century out of a sincere reaction against the cold formalism of the Reformation denominations, proceeded on a policy of tolerance and concession which led to the forces of ecumenism and has so deeply effected the Church. The German Baptists, and eventually the Grace Brethren Church, stood firm on their convictions. The Fundamentalist's heritage of separating for the purpose of preserving sound doctrine is part of what comes from this movement.

Not all Brethren ended up on the right track, but some did, and for that we can be tremendously thankful. Many of them had and have a clear grasp of the Gospel of Christ and respect the Bible as it is indeed, the Word of God. Out of the maze of Christian denominations that have come into existence since the Reformation, it is refreshing to see there really were those who understood the truth and diligently worked to preserve it for future generations. 📖

The Plymouth Brethren

Their History

John Nelson Darby stands out as the most prominent man in the beginning of the Plymouth Brethren, but another man, Edward Cronin, was really the earliest one to manifest the Plymouth Brethren ideas. Cronin was a medical student who had been converted from Catholicism. He moved to Dublin Ireland in 1826. There he was welcomed by all the Protestant churches and was allowed to partake in communion as a visitor. After it was clear that he was going to be a resident of Dublin, there was great pressure put upon him to settle in one church and become an official member of that assembly. He joined a church of independents but was very dissatisfied with established churches and the typical form their worship services took. After a few months he stopped attending church altogether and had his own quiet time on Sundays. One of the churches in Dublin then publicly denounced Dr. Cronin. This led another man, Edward Wilson, to withdraw from his church and join Cronin in breaking bread on Sundays. Over the next year or so, the curiosity of many was aroused by these men and others began joining their group.

Their central idea was that Christians might meet around the Lord's Table as the primary tool for fellowship, and that the meetings would have a freedom which allowed the Holy Spirit to direct what happened. There would be no clergy, no designated preachers, no stated order of service. As the Spirit led, people would speak, sing a hymn, or pray. Any believer had the freedom to participate in communion and no clergy was required to serve it.

When the Dublin meeting began, John Nelson Darby was a curate in the Church of Ireland. He pastored a mountain church and was greatly devoted to the Lord and the people to which he was assigned. He was frail in body, having to use crutches even to walk, and neglected his health and personal appearance in his attempt to serve Christ faithfully. When the Archbishop of Dublin petitioned the government for protection of the Irish clergy, Darby saw this as a great contradiction. Ministers preached against the world for rejecting Christ, and now they were asking the world to protect them in doing so.

About this same time, Darby came in contact with Dr. Cronin and began meeting with him for Bible study and then with the brethren for communion. This led to his resigning his position with the Church of Ireland and uniting with the brethren. Mr. Darby was destined to become a primary figure in the formulation of Plymouth Brethren doctrine and polity.

By 1830, the movement grew to five or six meetings in Ireland and some in England also began expressing similar sentiments. Darby traveled to England to meet with these folks and in 1832 was invited to Plymouth by Benjamin Wills Newton where he helped to strengthen a group of brethren that had begun meeting there. The Plymouth meeting grew to a rather significant size, about 800, and became a very influential part of the fledgling movement. At first, this group was referred to by outsiders as the Providence people, because they met in Providence Chapel. But as these brethren spread over England as evangelists and teachers, they were referred to as "those brethren from Plymouth," later shortened to the nickname "Plymouth Brethren," giving birth to the name of the denomination.

Ultimately, the Plymouth group would bring about a huge division among these brethren. None of the local churches, referred to as meetings, had pastors, nor were they organized with officers, membership, or other things that marked the denominational churches. Benjamin Newton, however, assumed specific leadership in the Plymouth meeting, dividing the preaching responsibilities between himself and only one other man. He also set up an official church board with elected elders and deacons, and assigned specific individuals to duties during the meeting times. Mr. Darby believed that all the brethren churches should function uniformly and Newton's actions were not only contrary to the Brethren concept, but was nearly identical to what had been left behind in the denominations. Darby went to Plymouth again and for several months led a protest against Newton and his ideas. The result was a split in which Darby took a minority from Providence Chapel and started another meeting in Plymouth. Besides this policy difference, Newton also manifested some serious doctrinal differences with Darby and the other brethren. Newton followed a reformed position while Darby was dispensational. The Brethren had come to understand the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, but Newton insisted the church would go through the tribulation. Then, Newton began teaching that Christ was subject to the sin nature of Adam and needed to be redeemed, saying this is why he submitted to John's baptism of repentance. This caused a tremendous stir among the brethren and led them to excommunicate the Plymouth meeting.

These events in Plymouth only laid the foundation for the division that would come. A meeting had been started in Bristol by two friends, George Muller and Henry Craik. They preached together in Bethesda Chapel and had a very effective ministry there that lasted for many years. Sometime after the Plymouth dispute, some of the people who fellowshiped with the Newton group began attending Bethesda Chapel. Muller and his associates made a decision to welcome these folks in full fellowship. A man in the congregation, George Alexander, objected and with a small following protested that these folks were part of an excommunicated congregation and should not be allowed to fellowship in Bethesda Chapel. This resulted

in the Bethesda Question which split the Plymouth Brethren into two groups, the Open Brethren and the Exclusive Brethren. The question was whether one local meeting should recognize the discipline of another meeting and restrict fellowship on that basis. Those who thought discipline was purely a local matter were called open brethren and those who thought it was a denominational matter were called exclusive brethren. The open brethren were less discriminating in whom they welcomed to participate in the Lord's supper, while the exclusive brethren extended this privilege only to those who were in good standing within the recognized circle of fellowship.

In the years following the Bethesda Question division, the open brethren prospered greatly as manifested by an extensive missions effort. They produced many excellent evangelists and missionaries and many were saved through sound gospel preaching. Eventually though, their insistence on the autonomy of the local church resulted in a lot of differences among them and little cooperation between them. Some of the open meetings used musical instruments and others would not. There was also a difference in how they determined who qualified to participate in communion. Those who laid out a strict criteria for who qualified to take communion were labeled tight meetings and those who took less care in the matter were labeled loose meetings. Some had stated preachers, and even paid them for their services, while others maintained a freer worship in which there were no stated speakers and no planned order of service. In free meetings, the brethren would gather and rely solely on the Holy Spirit to direct those who should speak and sing and pray. This worked well where godly men were present, but created some serious problems where immature believers were able to speak out and offer their unbiblical views. The ultimate result of all these differences was that the open meetings were not particularly divided, but they were certainly not united, each local meeting basically following its own ways.

It was very different for the exclusive brethren, of which John Darby was a member. Part of their system included the definite connection of all assemblies and the importance of uniformity among them. This maintained a definite continuity among all the meetings. Their heavy emphasis on discipline did lead to some extremes that divided the local churches into many different groups, not over doctrinal matters but along lines of church polity. In spite of this, though, the exclusive brethren produced some excellent Bible teachers and while the open meetings were greatly productive in missions, the exclusive meetings were greatly productive in teaching believers sound doctrine. One such Bible teacher was H.A. Ironsides, who started out in the open meetings, but later joined one of the exclusive groups, expressing that he never regretted having done so.

Their Doctrine

John Nelson Darby systematized and communicated much of what we consider to be fundamental Bible doctrine today. To begin with, he and his associates laid great emphasis on the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. Darby was often questioned about this, but could never be shaken in his absolute devotion to the integrity of the Bible as God's Word. He said,

If the world itself were to disappear and be annihilated, and the word of God alone remained as an invisible thread over the abyss, my soul would trust in it. After deep exercise of soul I was brought by grace to feel I could entirely. I never found it fail me since. I have often failed; but I never found it fail me.

John Nelson Darby: Defender of the Faith By Larry V. Crutchfield

From this respect for the Word of God came a diligent search of the Scriptures resulting in the laying out of such doctrines as the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, the personal visible resurrection of Christ, the eternal security of the believer, and dispensational theology including the distinction between Israel and the church, the pre-tribulation rapture of the church followed by the seventieth week of Daniel (which is seven years of tribulation) the Second coming of Christ with His church and the 1,000 year millennial kingdom.

The Plymouth Brethren do not maintain paid ministers, though voluntary contributions are allowed to those who do the work of the ministry. They do not ordain ministers but do recognize that certain men are gifted in preaching and teaching. These are acknowledged as elders and overseers of the local assembly.

End Note

The Plymouth Brethren give us a heritage of sound biblical teaching. While many, who lived about the same time as John Nelson Darby, studied the Scriptures as diligently as he did, most of them either approached their study with a bias and came away merely with confirmations of those preconceived notions, or else used a faulty method of interpretation resulting in equally tragic conclusions. Darby and his associates, however, approached the Word of God with integrity and laid the foundation for a rich heritage in fundamental doctrine.

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An Outline of Brethren Denominations

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Old German Baptist Brethren

The Church of the Brethren

The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches

From the United Brethren, 1767

United Christian Church

Evangelical United Brethren/United Methodist

Church of the United Brethren in Christ

River Brethren

From the River Brethren, late 18th Century

Old Order Brethren/Yorker Brethren

United Zion Church

The Brethren in Christ Church

Plymouth Brethren, 1826

Open Meetings

Exclusive Meetings

CHAPTER TWELVE THE BAPTISTS

Their History

One of the doctrinal changes that came out of the Reformation was the rejection of infant baptism. Baptism, it was learned from the investigation of Scripture, was something a person chose as a result of believing in Christ. Infants were incapable of this and so baptizing them was spiritually irrelevant. Baptism was to be reserved for those who could comprehend the Gospel and of their own volition receive the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior. While the Anabaptists were among the first to believe these things regarding baptism, the English Separatists borrowed the doctrine from them and made it a trade mark of their teachings. In addition, the English Baptists rediscovered that the word baptism meant to immerse and initiated this practice in contrast to those who baptized by sprinkling or pouring. The term Baptist was first used as a label in 1644, but the Baptist beginnings go back to the start of the 17th Century.

The roots of Baptists actually begin with the issue of separation of church and state. Throughout Roman Catholic history, the church had exercised considerable influence over civil government. This was reversed in the 16th Century with the rise of nationalism in European countries. Civil authorities became the symbols of unity for ethnic groups and as such were able to establish centralized governments which became more powerful than the Church and the Pope. It was this very thing that made it possible for King Henry VIII of England to sever the English Christians from Rome and establish an independent Anglican Church. The effect of this was to put the civil government in control of church affairs with the power to select its leaders and determine its policies. The Baptists were originally known as Separatists, because they believed the Church should function separate from the influence of civil government. One of their early leaders, John Smyth, wrote, "The magistrate, by virtue of his office, is not to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, nor to compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine, but to leave the Christian religion to the free conscience of every one, and to meddle only with political matters."

European History

As the 17th Century began, many English Christians were unhappy with the Church of England, but among the discontent there arose two different points of view as to what should be done. One group became known as Puritans. They believed the best thing to do was reform the Anglican Church from within. The other group was called Separatists. They believed attempts to reform the existing church were futile. In addition, they rejected the notion that civil government had the right to exercise authority over the church. They decided to separate from the church altogether and start afresh on their own. Technically this was illegal and led to some serious problems for the Separatists.

They were heavily persecuted for their views and for their independent meetings. So, they moved to Holland where they sought more freedom to worship according to their own consciences. Here they encountered two significant influences. A worldly influence on their children resulted in some becoming the Pilgrims who traveled to America on the Mayflower in 1620. A more positive influence came from the Anabaptists who welcomed them into their homes and introduced them to the concept of believer's baptism.

One of the Separatists, named John Smyth, was quite taken with this new doctrine and poured water over himself and several others in the manner of the Anabaptists. This occurred in 1609 and is looked to as the establishment of the first Baptist church. Not long after this, the English would discover that the word baptism meant to immerse, after which only immersion was used by the Baptists.

John Smyth's interest in Anabaptist doctrine went beyond believer's baptism. He attempted to turn the English Separatists living in Holland into Mennonites, but not everyone liked the idea. Some of them thought it would threaten their British identity. So, in 1612 Thomas Helwys led a small group back to England where they started a Baptist Church near London. In that same year, Helwys published a paper entitled "A Short Description of the Misery of Iniquity" in which he challenged the King's right to control the church. He was immediately arrested and never heard from again. The movement was established, however, and would not be stopped. It included such men as John Bunyan, a Baptist preacher from Bedford, who spent twelve years in prison because of his challenges to the Church of England. He was given a promise of release if he would stop preaching. He responded, "I can suffer for my Lord, but I cannot deny Him." Bunyan wrote his famous allegory, "Pilgrim's Progress," in a later imprisonment.

In 1638, a significant division occurred among the English Baptists that would have a great effect on their theology. The first Baptist churches had been general Baptists; that is, they believed that salvation was free to all mankind. But a group of Baptists decided to assume the theology of John Calvin, including his view of limited atonement. They called themselves Particular Baptists because they believed salvation was only for the elect.

Things continued to be difficult for the Baptists in England until 1689 when Parliament enacted the Act of Toleration. Immediately, the Baptists called a general assembly in London during which they adopted the Westminster Confession as their doctrinal statement. In doing so, they adjusted the sections on church polity, ordinances, and civil magistrates, but essentially maintained Calvinistic theology.

American History

Baptist history in America parallels its history in England in that the separation of church and state was the first issue upon which it was founded and baptism was the second. English Separatists were among the first to move to America. In general history they are known as the Pilgrims who landed on New England soil in 1620. Soon after, a group of Puritans also settled in Massachusetts. The Separatists and Puritans quickly joined forces and established a state and a church that very much resembled the English government and the Anglican Church. The civil government was given the power to enforce church law on the community, thus disallowing the religious freedom they had come seeking for themselves.

In 1631, Roger Williams arrived in the midst of these conditions and brought with him deep Separatist convictions. Very soon after his arrival, Williams had become pastor of the church at Salem. It was the practice of the local authorities to punish those who failed to attend services on Sunday, but Roger Williams strongly objected to this and spoke out against the jurisdiction of civil government over church affairs. This made him unwelcome in Salem, so he moved to Plymouth where he started a mission to the Indians. He was given a second invitation to Pastor the church at Salem which he accepted; but upon returning he resumed preaching his Separatist views. In 1635, he was charged with violating the law by what he preached. He was subsequently tried, convicted and sentenced to banishment from the colony. He moved to what is now Rhode Island, bought some land from the Indians, and established the town of Providence in 1636.

As Williams studied the Scriptures, he came to understand the concept of believer's baptism. Believer's baptism by immersion was not being practiced yet anywhere in the colonies, but Williams decided it was time to start. In March of 1639, he had Ezekiel Holliman baptize him and then he did the same for Holliman and ten other people. Thus was the beginning of the first Baptist Church in America.

In 1643, the little group in Providence and three neighboring towns secured a charter for the Colony of Rhode Island. Their freedom of movement was restricted though because the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law making Baptist views illegal. An interesting incident reversed this oppression nearly thirty years later. In 1671, several Quakers were hanged for heresy. This drew the attention of the English Parliament, who ordered the Massachusetts Colony to send all religious prisoners to England to guarantee them a fair trial. Rather than submit to Parliament, the Massachusetts authority released all religious prisoners. The effect of this was to open the door for the Baptists to spread their views over a wider area.

At the end of the 17th Century, the Baptists began moving south. In 1682, a Baptist church was founded in South Carolina and in 1688 two Baptist churches were started in Philadelphia. In 1707, the Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed with five member churches. This established a pattern for Baptist Churches that continues in large part today. Rather than create new denominations, Baptists tend to join together in Associations or Conferences in which local churches maintain their autonomy but meet together for fellowship. These associations provide a forum for discussing Baptist concerns and a means for promoting worldwide missionary endeavors.

The Great Awakening swept across America from about 1733 to 1744, but it highlighted a difference in theology among Baptists, resulting in a division of the churches. The preaching of the revival movement, especially by George Whitefield, was rooted in a general salvation which conflicted with the Calvinistic viewpoint of a particular salvation. As in England, the American Baptists were divided over this issue. In America, the general Baptists became known as the New Lights, or Separates, following the teachings of George Whitefield. The particular Baptists became known as the Old Lights, or Regulars, maintaining a Calvinistic view and rejecting the concept of revivalism. Many Congregationalists of New England left their churches during the revival movement and joined with the New Light Baptists, making them a much larger group than the Old Lights.

During this time, another Baptist distinctive emerged which has greatly influenced the church through the years. This matter concerned the importance of the individual's standing before God. As Baptists believed in the autonomy of the local church, they also came to believe in the autonomy of the individual. They came to understand that God did not judge people in groups. Each person stood before God personally and answered for his own actions and beliefs. Thus, an individual's accountability to God was more important than his accountability to an organization. This concept was rooted in biblical teaching; but carried to its extreme, it opened the door to some serious doctrinal problems. A standard theology was difficult to maintain among the Baptists because of the freedom possessed by each individual to choose his beliefs for himself.

The American Revolution proved to be very beneficial to the Baptist movement. The New Lights and the Old Lights were able to find common ground in the fight for independence and the religious freedom that

accompanied it. The first amendment of the new Constitution guaranteeing religious freedom to the Citizens of the United States was a direct result of Baptist efforts. Their zeal for the cause of freedom produced a great popularity throughout the colonies and the church began to grow rapidly, especially in the south. In 1733 there had been only 500 Baptists in America. In 1774 that number had grown to 35,000, in 1800 to 100,000 and in 1812 to nearly 175,000. This growth was not limited to the American continent either. Great efforts were initiated in world missions through the works of men like Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice and John Mason Peck.

But as much as the Revolutionary War contributed to the growth of the Baptists, the prelude to the Civil War contributed to a schism between them. Many of the southern Baptists were slave holders. This became a critical issue at the General Conference of Baptists in Philadelphia held in 1844. The northern Baptists wielded a considerable influence at the meetings and rejected many southern men for positions of leadership solely because they owned slaves. The result was the formation of a separate general conference the following year. In 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention officially came into being.

Besides slavery, there was also another issue about which the northern and southern Baptists differed. Up to this point, all Baptist Churches, local conferences, committees and associations had operated independently. The northern Baptists wanted it to remain this way. The southern Baptists wanted to centralize control and move toward denominationalism. The formation of the Southern Baptist Convention was probably based as much on this issue as it was on slavery.

The northern Baptists continued under the leadership of the Philadelphia Conference until they organized under the name Northern Baptist Convention in 1907. The name was changed to the American Baptist Convention in 1950 and was changed again to the American Baptist Churches in the United States of America in 1973.

From here it is impossible to include a brief summary of the beginning of all the Baptist churches. Some of their denominations have emerged through natural processes as Baptists of like mind in various parts of the country formed fellowships for purposes of cooperation. Some of these include the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. founded in 1895, the American Baptist Association started in 1905, and the National Association of Free Will Baptists formed in 1935. Other Baptist denominations have resulted from splits. For example, the General Association of Regular Baptists split off of the American Baptist Churches, USA (Northern Convention) in 1932 and the Conservative Baptist Association departed from the same body in 1947. The Baptist Missionary Association of America left the American Baptist Association in 1950. The General Conference of Evangelical Baptist Churches exited from the National Association of Free Will Baptists in 1935. And, The Progressive National Baptist Convention left the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. in 1961. In all, there are twenty seven Baptist denominations in America today besides about 100,000 totally independent local Baptist churches, many of which participate in various fellowships. As of 1994, there were about 32 million members of Baptist churches.

Their Doctrine

To understand Baptist doctrine, we must consider it under two perspectives. One regards the distinctives which define what it means to be Baptist. The other reflects the great diversity of theology that exists among Baptist churches.

Baptist Distinctives

Many Baptists hold to the fundamental doctrines of the faith which result from a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture. These include: the verbal plenary inspiration and the absolute inerrancy of the Word of God; the triune God eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the deity of Jesus Christ and his virgin birth; the fall and depravity of man; the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ; the way of salvation being by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone; justification by faith apart from works; regeneration of the repentant sinner who calls on the name of the Lord to be saved; progressive sanctification through a faithful walk in the Spirit; the resurrection of the righteous to everlasting life and the unrighteous to everlasting death; and the visible return of Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom.

Some other beliefs formulate the distinctives of Baptist identity. Baptists believe there are two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's supper. Baptism is for believers only and is to be done by immersion only. Infant baptism is unscriptural and is not to be practiced at all. The Lord's supper is totally symbolic. Some Baptist churches practice closed communion which means only Baptists are allowed to participate. The complete separation of church and state is necessary because civil government has no authority over church affairs. Each local church is autonomous with complete freedom to govern itself. The congregational form of government is the manner in which decisions are to be made. There are two offices for the church, pastor and deacon. Many Baptists also believe that the Pastor of a local church is a ruling bishop and the Deacons

are to be those who assist the Pastor in performing his ministerial duties. The individual is responsible directly to God to answer for his conduct and faith.

Most of these items are self explanatory, but this last matter warrants some further explanation. The Baptists believe that because God created each human being with a mind and a will, they are also each responsible for the decisions they make. In the end, man is judged individually and that judgment is based solely on the choices each makes for himself. Therefore, the will of the individual is highly respected.

Baptists have often been severely persecuted by other religious groups. In fact John Bunyan wrote his famous "Pilgrim's Progress" while imprisoned. Yet Baptists have never persecuted any group, for Baptists believe the Bible teaches it is the privilege of the individual to choose error if he so desires. Each person has "individual soul liberty" to choose his own church, determine his own fate, and decide for himself what the Bible teaches (or deny the Bible if he desires).

Biblical Basis for Baptists By L. Duane Brown

It should be noted that this is different than the doctrine of tolerance practiced by liberals. Tolerance welcomes different doctrinal beliefs as viable alternatives. Individual soul liberty merely recognizes the freedom of the individual to decide what he believes, but it does not accept the validity of everything the individual chooses.

Theological Diversity

The Baptist distinctive of individual soul liberty has had both a positive and negative effect on its adherents. On the one hand, it has made men realize that they are individually and personally responsible to God. This is good and biblical. On the other hand, it has allowed some to follow a wide variety of doctrines. Individuals may be found in each of the three major soteriological camps -- Calvinistic predestinarians, Arminian, and general salvation securitists -- all of which are still called Baptist.

All three of these salvation doctrines have a part in Baptist history. The Particular Baptists, dating back to 1644, adopted the Westminster Confession in 1689. Some of the early General Baptists were Arminian, having come under the influence of the Anabaptists in Holland; and the Free Will Baptists date back to the early 1700's. Eternal security is clearly stated in a general salvation context by the New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1830.

Five point Calvinism has a strong following among Baptists today. There are several doctrinal statements which reflect this persuasion. For example, the Articles of Faith of the Kehukee Association in North Carolina says:

We believe that it is utterly out of the power of men as fallen creatures, to keep the law of God perfectly, repent of their sins truly, or believe in Jesus Christ, except they be drawn by the Holy Ghost. We believe that in God's appointed time and way (by means which He has ordained) the elect shall be called, justified, pardoned and sanctified, and that it is impossible they can utterly refuse the call, but shall be made willing by divine grace to receive the offers of mercy.

It seems ironic that one Baptist can be so strongly Calvinistic and another Baptist just as strongly Arminian. Nevertheless, that is the case. To its credit, Arminianism teaches that salvation is free to all who will believe. Unfortunately, it also teaches that man's free will makes it possible for him to lose his salvation. The main body of Arminian Baptists is the National Association of Free Will Baptists. In their doctrinal statement they say:

There are strong grounds to hope that the truly regenerate will persevere unto the end, and be saved, through the power of divine grace which is pledged for their support; but their future obedience and final salvation are neither determined nor certain, since through infirmity and manifold temptations they are in danger of falling; and they ought, therefore, to watch and pray lest they make shipwreck of their faith and be lost.

A third group -- also called Baptist -- subscribes to a soteriology which is neither Calvinist nor Arminian. This third view consists of a belief in general salvation balanced by a conviction of eternal security. This belief is clearly explained by the New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1830.

We believe that the Scriptures teach that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the Gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by cordial, penitent and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth, but his own determined depravity and voluntary rejection of the Gospel; which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation....We believe the Scriptures teach that such only are real believers as endure to the end; that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark

which distinguishes them from superficial professors; that a special Providence watches over their welfare; and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Additional Doctrinal Variations

Another consequence of the freedom expressed among Baptists is the swelling of liberalism among their ranks. This is manifested in several corners of the Baptist movement including the American Baptist Churches, USA which participates in the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and in the World Council of Churches, and the Southern Baptist Convention which is strongly divided between liberals and conservatives. The liberalism manifested among these Baptists is so strong that it includes the rejection of biblical inerrancy and an acceptance of unbiblical modernism.

Landmarkism goes to the opposite extreme and turns some Baptists into exclusivists. The basic tenet of Landmarkism is that a church is not a church unless it is a Baptist church. A person may be genuinely saved and part of the Body of Christ, but he is not considered to be part of a true local church unless he attends a Baptist church. Along with this, baptism is only recognized when performed by a true Baptist church. Thus a person may have been baptized by immersion as a believer, but if he was not baptized in a recognized Baptist church, it would be necessary for him to be baptized again in order to join a true Baptist church.

Another divergence is the social activism manifested by the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. which split off of the predominantly African American National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. during the height of the civil rights movement of the early sixties. This group included men like Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, and Gardner C. Taylor. Social issues became the main theme of their sermons displacing biblical theology.

Responses

Liberalism will be addressed more fully in the next chapter. It is sufficient to say here that liberalism is totally unscriptural and leads modern day Baptists far away from their strong biblical heritage. The fallacy of Landmarkism seems self evident. How can a group of truly born again believers be joined together in a local assembly and not be a true church simply because they are not called Baptists? How can a believer be baptized by another immersed believer and not be properly baptized? The answers are rhetorical. Equally obvious is the error of social activism. Social order is of value only while a man lives on earth. If a man is called to preach, his duty is to address things that go far beyond temporal conditions.

Calvinism was addressed in the chapter on Presbyterianism and the Reformed Churches. The Arminian doctrine of losing one's salvation was addressed in the chapters on the Anabaptists and Methodism. The Baptists that follow these beliefs may be answered with the same things discussed on those pages.

There are, on the other hand, many Baptists that are soundly fundamental. Bible literalists, where ever they may be found, share a great kinship in the doctrines they believe. As a result, there is a sense in which all Bible believers may be called Baptists and many Baptists may be called Bible believers. They share the beliefs that all men are sinners and cannot save themselves; that the only means of salvation is through Jesus Christ and His shed blood; that once a person confesses his sin to God and receives Christ as his personal Savior, he is forgiven, justified, born again, and eternally saved; that at the moment of regeneration, the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and immediately placed by the Spirit into the Body of Christ; and that water baptism is a symbolic testimony to those who witness of the believers identification with Christ through salvation.

Someone might ask, "What does it mean to be a Baptist?" The technical answer is extremely difficult to determine. It is an interesting phenomenon that Baptist distinctives do not include ecumenism, yet among the Baptists one might find nearly every possible doctrinal position.

It is impossible, therefore, to provide a complete and definitive list of which Baptist churches hold to which theological positions. Individual soul liberty among the Baptists allows for a variety of doctrinal manifestations. The beliefs of some Baptist groups are very well defined and the group itself is restricted to only those who agree with the stated position; but some of these groups are not in harmony with one another. For example, some believe in eternal security and others do not. Other Baptist groups are less particular about their membership and consequently, some people who believe completely opposite theologies co-exist in the same denomination. Then there is the myriad of independent Baptists who vary from church to church and individual to individual.

Remember the old game called "Truth or Consequences?" At the end, the host would declare, "Will the real John Doe please stand up?" That request might help clarify matters here. Will the real Bible believers please stand up among the Baptists?! There are many professing Baptists who can respond to this by standing tall, having built upon the Baptist heritage a remarkable reputation for holding firm to the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God and for clearly and diligently preaching the Gospel of Christ around the world, winning many lost souls to the Savior. The real Bible believers among the Baptists are those who respect the

Bible as inerrant, believe the Bible with an unwavering faith, interpret the Bible literally, and obey the Bible implicitly. These genuine, sincere people are otherwise known as Christians and are not really any different than other Christians who do not call themselves Baptists but believe exactly the same things. But some Baptists are left sitting. They have the name (Revelation 3:1), but they are not following the truth, and in the end, they will suffer the consequences. 📖

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN
Fundamentalism
And The Importance of Sound Doctrine

The Church was established in the beginning with the traditions of sound doctrine (II Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6; II Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9). But, professing Christians began deviating from this position even before the New Testament Scriptures were completed (Romans 16:17; I Timothy 1:3,10; 6:3; II John 9,10). For this reason, there are strong admonitions in the Bible to defend and protect the purity of the teachings of the Word of God (Romans 16:17; I Timothy 1:3; 4:6,16; 6:1; Titus 1:10-11; 2:1,7).

Fundamentalism is that segment of Christianity which is committed to the preservation of sound doctrine based on an inerrant, infallible, divinely inspired Bible. It is not a modern movement contrived by contentious people who wish to create turmoil among the people of God. Rather, it is the core group of the visible church that has been committed to the purity of truth throughout church history. Fundamentalists are those who are determined to hold fast without compromise to the form of sound words which they have learned from Scripture.

The History of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism began when the church was born on the day of Pentecost. Even liberal theologians acknowledge this. One such man, Kirsopp Lake, said,

It is a mistake, often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that Fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind: it is the...survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians....I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a Fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* of the Church is on the Fundamentalist side."

In Pursuit of Purity, By David Beale, Page 4

So it is appropriate to say that the Apostles were Fundamentalists. Many of the statements regarding sound doctrine come from the pen of the Apostle Paul. He told Timothy he was to "*hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*" (II Timothy 1:13). He said, "*If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained*" (I Timothy 4:6). Then he told Timothy, "*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth...*" (I Timothy 6:3-5). This matter was so serious that Paul told Timothy he was to "*charge some that they teach no other doctrine*" (I Timothy 1:3). He also told Titus that certain "*mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not...*" (Titus 1:11). And, he told the Romans that they were to "*mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*" (Romans 16:17).

The other apostles also warned against the intrusion of false doctrine and the importance of being separated from error. Peter said, "*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*" (II Peter 2:1-2). And, John said, "*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed*" (II John 10).

It is important to note that these Scriptural warnings concerning false doctrine were addressing activities taking place inside the church. The attacks of heathen from outside the church are easy to identify and defend against. But when those who are part of the visible church and who use the name of Christ are the ones who are teaching error and working against the integrity of the truth, it is a far more dangerous situation.

The early church contended with this problem extensively. By the year 300 A.D. there were many groups calling themselves Christians who had deviated from literal biblical truth in one way or another. Beginning in the 4th century, great church councils were convened to deal with some of these issues and preserve sound doctrine. The early creeds written by these councils set a precedent for the writing of doctrinal statements to outline in simple fashion the teachings of the Word of God.

With this in the background of the church, it is not surprising to find in our modern era those who became alarmed that the truth of the Word of God was being changed by leading churchmen into a liberal lie. In the 1800's modernism became epidemic throughout the mainline denominations. The result was a radical list of doctrinal notions far different from that which the literal words of Scripture teaches. They included things such as the following:

1. The Bible is not the absolute, inerrant, authoritative Word of God. It is a compilation of writings of men, full of errors and inconsistencies.
2. Man is not corrupt on the inside. He does not sin because he is sinful. He is sinful merely because he sins. Because of this, even non-Christians have the capacity to strive for and achieve holiness.
3. Sin is the failure to distribute wealth to the poor due to the selfishness of the rich. Salvation is the reformation of society.
4. The substitutionary atonement of Christ could not be true because the idea that the innocent would die for the guilty violates human sensibility.
5. Salvation is not by instantaneous regeneration, but is a result of education. A child that is taught Christianity from birth is a Christian because of what he has learned.
6. Christianity is defined by the experience of its adherents and so theology adapts to the experience of the present generation.
7. Jesus Christ was not born of a virgin.
8. Belief in the deity of Jesus Christ is a heathen superstition.
9. The miracles of the Bible are not true.

In direct reaction to this, good men of the 19th century were driven to make sound doctrine known. To accomplish this they started holding Bible conferences dedicated to the teaching of the truth of the Word of God. The first of these was the Niagara Bible Conference which began meeting at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario in 1883. Other Conferences were started all over the country, mostly under the influence of the men who conducted the Niagara Conference.

Out of these conferences came a dedication to intensive Bible study. One of the results of this was the printing of the Scofield Reference Bible. C.I. Scofield had been involved in the Bible Conference movement and solicited other preachers who were also involved to assist him in editing and preparing this Bible for publication. It was immediately popular and quickly sold two million copies, representing the hunger for digging into the depths of God's Word. The doctrine taught in the notes was thoroughly Fundamental and continues today as a resource for sound doctrine.

Also out of these conferences came the Bible Institute and Bible College movement. The Colleges and Universities that had begun as Seminaries and trained American preachers for many decades had fallen prey to liberal theologians. Schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton originally taught men to believe in the literal words of Scripture and to preach sound doctrinal truths. Over the years this changed dramatically, leaving a serious void. Small Bible schools were started to recapture what had been forsaken. Many of these became today's Bible Colleges.

As the 19th century ended and the 20th century began, pulpits in many denominational churches reverberated with the defense of sound doctrine against the liberalism that was strangling the church. Such preachers believed the biblical mandate was to purify the church from within just as the Puritans had tried to do centuries before. But the liberals were smart politicians and gained control of the leadership positions, giving them the power to determine denominational policy. The battles between the Modernists and the Fundamentalists were sometimes brutal. Good men were tried for heresy, lives were threatened, and political tricks tarnished what should have been righteous procedures. It was so fierce at times that some good conservative men backed down from the confrontation and made unfortunate concessions for the sake of peace. It was these acts of compromise and not the weakness of the Fundamentalist position that gave the liberals victory in the denominations.

By the 1930's it became obvious to most Fundamentalists that the Puritan route was futile and it was time to walk the path of the Separatists. It had always been their desire to purify their denominations from within, but modernism so thoroughly permeated them that this became virtually impossible. It was at this point that Fundamentalists adopted the policy of coming out of the denominations.

This brought about the beginning of several organizations designed to facilitate fellowship and cooperation among the new independents. The Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA) was started in 1930, emerging out of the American Conference of Undenominational Churches (ACUC) which had started meeting in 1923. The Association of Regular Baptist Churches (ARBC) was started in 1932 by a group which departed from the Northern Baptist Convention. The American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) was started by Carl McIntire in 1941. But perhaps the most prominent organization was the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) started by a massive joint effort in 1942. Harold J. Ockenga was elected its first president but other charter members included men like Lewis Sperry Chafer, Bob Jones, Sr., Harry Ironside, William McCarrell, William L. Pettingill, and John R. Rice.

The purpose of the National Association of Evangelicals was to give the Fundamentalists a forum in which they could work together in promoting sound doctrine, conduct biblical evangelism, and encourage world missions. As Fundamentalism emerged from its contest against modernism, the words evangelical,

fundamental, and conservative were practically identical in meaning and application. But almost as soon as the NAE began, a new battle line was drawn in the sand.

In their conflict with modernism, the Fundamentalists stood valiantly for the truth and the integrity of the Word of God. But by the 1940's, some conservatives were accusing the fundamental movement of being cold and without compassion. Sound doctrine was all well and good, they said, but if the church was not meeting people's felt needs, Christianity had no heart. So it was time for the Evangelicals to change their image. It was time for a "new evangelicalism." Harold Ockenga claims to have coined this term "new evangelicalism" in his 1948 convocation speech for Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. This new evangelicalism would be different from the old. It would have a friendlier face, a more conciliatory attitude, and a deeper social consciousness. In his own words, Dr. Ockenga said,

Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave in the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena. While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism, this address repudiated its ecclesiology and its social theory. The ringing call for a repudiation of separatism and the summons to social involvement received a hearty response from many Evangelicals...It differed from fundamentalism in its repudiation of separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. It had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political, and economic areas of life.

As quoted in *Fundamentalism, Modernism, and New-Evangelicalism*

This new emphasis by the New Evangelicals actually reversed the entire effort of Fundamentalism since the mid-19th century. The operating policy of Fundamentalism had always been separatism. At first, its intent was to separate the modernists from the established churches. When that became impossible, Fundamentalists separated themselves from the established churches. New Evangelicalism adopted the exact opposite as an operating policy. It decided to infiltrate the churches, colleges and organizations steeped in liberalism. In doing so, it set aside the defense of sound doctrine against the tenets of liberalism, and adopted a policy of dialogue with liberals, seeking to establish a basis for cooperation instead of conflict. In its determination to be positive and not negative, it set aside the negative elements of the Gospel which tend to be convicting and emphasized the more positive elements which have greater appeal. Furthermore, New Evangelicalism forsook the attempt to keep the church pure by separation from the world and determined to take the church into the world and be like the world as a means to win the world, grossly misapplying the Bible verse, "*I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

New Evangelicalism's policy of infiltration and cooperation has never convinced a liberal to change his mind about anything, but it has convinced a multitude of Evangelicals and even some Fundamentalists to change their minds about a lot of things. Men who preached the true Gospel of Jesus Christ entered into cooperative evangelism with those who preached another gospel. Evangelicals, liberal Protestants and Catholics joined hands in vast crusades to reach the unchurched. While a Gospel message was preached from the platform, it was left to be interpreted differently by the representatives of each group that counseled those who responded. The whole idea of *contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3) was thrown to the wind and replaced with compromising the faith with all the variations of it that were followed by would-be saints.

As the New Evangelicals encountered different forms of worship, musical expressions, dress standards, and program policies, compromise became the standard response. Unity among all those who called themselves Christians became the number one priority. Uniformity of belief was relegated to the archives, but a unity of soul expressed by a warm feeling toward one another was elevated as the primary message of Christianity. Those who had walked in the Spirit by following Him into all truth began holding hands with those who preached another spirit without ever noticing that it was different. An ever decreasing focus on doctrine soon convinced many that doctrine did not matter. As long as professing Christians loved one another and worked together in presenting a positive image to society, they felt the church was fulfilling its mission.

This created an horrendous dilemma for the Fundamentalists. All they ever wanted was to keep the church pure and separated from error. Now, those who claimed to believe a fundamental theology were cuddling up to the liberals who had always been the common enemy. Fundamentalists who were committed to purity and the preservation of sound doctrine faced the necessity of separating from some of their own. But if they were going to maintain purity, they had no choice. By the 1950's, the spiritual children of those who had separated from modernism in the mainline denominations began separating themselves from the compromising New Evangelicals. The problem with this was that in an ecclesiastical world of growing conciliation and harmony, a policy which separated Fundamentalists from Evangelicals cast a critical shadow on Fundamentalists as egotistical, pharisaical, mean spirited, cantankerous religious bigots who were determined to keep the church divided. It did not matter that they were defending truth. What good was an unfriendly truth. A friendly compromise played much better with the public.

As the 20th century closes, the dilemma has not yet been resolved. Every year, more Fundamentalists grow weary of the battle and give in to the New Evangelical philosophy. The image of Christianity has become a more significant issue than its integrity. The false idea that we must be liked first before we will be believed is turning the hearts of multitudes of believers in these troubling days. If the Lord does not come soon to rapture the church, one must wonder if Fundamentalism can even survive through one more generation. But as one muses about such gloomy prospects, he must be reminded of Elijah, who thought he was the only Fundamentalist left in his day. To console his heart, God informed him that there were 7,000 others in Israel that had remained faithful. There have been dark days in past eras of church history, and still the Word of God has been preserved and preachers have been raised up to proclaim it with conviction to this day. Take heart, O weary soul, *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord* (I Corinthians 1:9).

The Importance of Sound Doctrine

In his book, *In Pursuit of Purity*, David O. Beale said,

Most assuredly, there are certain irreducible minimums, "the fundamentals," which Fundamentalists hold sacred and inviolable and which they earnestly defend....Fundamentalists no longer band together around a least common denominator of Christian doctrine. Rather, they attempt to unite around "the whole counsel of God" in pursuit of scriptural holiness, believing that whatever the Bible says is so.

In Pursuit of Purity, page 7

Some today consider themselves to be Fundamentalists because they believe the Five Fundamentals -- as though that is all that is required to be a Fundamentalist. The Five Fundamentals was a statement issued by the Presbyterians in 1910 as the essential and necessary requirements for the licensing of Presbyterian ministers. It was issued as a result of a swirling movement of heresy among the Presbyterians in which the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture was being denied along with many other doctrines derived from it. The Five Fundamentals were stated as:

1. The inerrancy of the original manuscripts of Scripture
2. Christ's virgin birth
3. His vicarious atonement
4. His bodily resurrection
5. The reality of miracles as recorded in the Scriptures.

The Presbyterians never intended this as a statement which would limit Fundamentalism to belief in these five things. An accompanying statement affirmed that other doctrines taught by the Bible were equally important. The five fundamentals served as a starting point for examining would be Presbyterian ministers, not as a complete list of sound doctrine. The problem in 1910 was that even these five very basic doctrines were being denied by Presbyterian Pastors and Seminary Professors. If these truths were being denied, it was useless to wrestle over others.

The question is whether Fundamentalism ever only consisted of a defense of certain "irreducible minimums." There is considerable evidence that historic Fundamentalism went far beyond the five fundamentals of the Presbyterians.

The five fundamentals have only to do with the Presbyterian aspect of the struggle with modernism....The bulk of Fundamentalism, especially the Baptists of every stripe who composed the majority by far, never accepted the five fundamentals alone. The World's Christian Fundamentals Association, founded in 1919, had at least a dozen main doctrines highlighted. The same was true of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, which originated in 1920. A true Fundamentalist would under no circumstances restrict his doctrinal position to five fundamentals. Even Dr. Carl F.H. Henry, a New Evangelical theologian, listed at least several dozen doctrines essential to the Faith.

G. Archer Weniger as quoted in *Fundamentalism, Modernism, and New-Evangelicalism*

The doctrinal statements developed by the 19th century Fundamentalists did indeed contain far more than the five fundamentals. The 1878 Niagara Creed is one example. It began with a clear statement on the inspiration of the Bible:

We believe "that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," by which we understand the whole of the book called the Bible; nor do we take the statement in the sense in which it is sometimes foolishly said that works of human genius are inspired, but in the sense that the

Holy Ghost gave the very words of the sacred writings to holy men of old; and that His Divine inspiration is not in different degrees, but extends equally and fully to all parts of these writings, historical, poetical, doctrinal and prophetic, and to the smallest word, and inflection of a word, provided such word is found in the original manuscripts: 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:13; Mark 12:26, 36; 13:11; Acts 1:16; 2:4.

This was followed by statements on the nature of the Godhead, the creation and fall of man, the total corruption of human nature, the impossibility of man saving himself, redemption solely through the blood of Christ and the impossibility of salvation through any other means, salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, the absolute assurance of salvation by those who are in Christ, Christ being found in all the Scriptures, the church being the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit being a Divine person who permanently indwells believers, personal separation from the world, the bodily resurrection of believers at the premillennial coming of Jesus Christ, the great white throne judgment of the lost when they will be cast into the eternal lake of fire, and the restoration of Israel to its land as the people of God.

Granted, there were some differences among the fundamentalists, particularly concerning prophecy and the timing of the rapture (although the Scofield Reference Bible is a testimony to the prevailing of the Pre-tribulationist view as well as other truly Fundamental beliefs). But among them there was a singular commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God. The Bible Conferences provided many opportunities for a discussion of substantive issues and a dialogue among thoughtful men as they pursued an understanding of the literal meaning of the words of Scripture.

The real heart and soul of Fundamentalism consists of two basic things. One is the integrity of the Word of God. Fundamentalists believe that all the Bible is divinely inspired, infallible and inerrant and is to be believed literally right down to the "smallest word, and inflection of a word." Modernism began in the 19th century with an aggressive attack on the Word of God through Higher Criticism. Higher Criticism examines the historic origins, authorship and dating of the books of the Bible. Modernism used Higher Criticism to deny the divine origin of Scripture, and the human authorship and dating of the books of the Bible as accepted by Bible believers. For example, Jesus stated in John 5:46-47 that Moses wrote the beginning part of the Old Testament: *For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?* Higher Criticism says, however, that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible.

However much we may believe that there is a genuine Mosaic foundation in the Pentateuch, it is difficult to lay the finger upon it, and to say with confidence, here Moses himself is speaking.

Professor Sanday of Oxford, in the Bampton Lectures for 1903. As quoted in The Fundamentals

Professor Sanday contradicted Jesus' claim that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. The ramifications of such criticism of the text of Scripture is devastating to one's ability to establish any belief based on the statements made in the Bible. If the words credited even to Jesus are not accurate, how does one know if any of the Bible is credible? Without an absolute confidence in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, there is no basis for the defense of any doctrine whatsoever. The effect of higher criticism was to convince many that God did not write the Bible at all, but that it was a compilation of human writings which were not reliable as a source for beliefs. The Bible was thus relegated to fables and fairy tales. In the words of John Shelby Spong, a bishop in the Episcopal Church in America:

Am I suggesting that these stories of the virgin birth are not literally true? The answer is a simple and direct "Yes." Of course these narratives are not literally true. Stars do not wander, angels do not sing, virgins do not give birth, magi do not travel to a distant land to present gifts to a baby, and shepherds do not go in search of a newborn savior....To talk of a Father God who has a divine-human son by a virgin woman is a mythology that our generation would never have created, and obviously, could not use. To speak of a Father God so enraged by human evil that he required propitiation for our sins that we cannot pay and thus demands the death of the divine-human son as a guilt offering is a ludicrous idea to our century. The sacrificial concept that focuses on the saving blood of Jesus that somehow washes me clean, so popular in Evangelical and Fundamentalist circles, is by and large repugnant to us today.

From *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, by John Spong as quoted in *Fundamentalism, Modernism, and New-Evangelicalism* by David W. Cloud

This statement illustrates that once you destroy the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture the entire spectrum of doctrines that stem from the literal interpretation of an infallible Bible fall into the category of fiction. For this reason, Fundamentalism emerged in the 19th century with great force against the proponents

of higher criticism and similar attacks against the integrity of God's Word.

The second basic thing of which Fundamentalism consists is a pursuit of purity in doctrinal belief and a determination to separate from false doctrine. The Scriptures are full of admonitions concerning the importance of sound doctrine and the dangers of false doctrine. I Timothy 6:3-5 says, *"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing...from such withdraw thyself."* II Thessalonians 3:6 and 14 says, *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us....And if any obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."* And Romans 16:17 says, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* It was on this basis that Fundamentalism persisted in the 20th century by separating from the New Evangelicals. These compromising Evangelicals had brought truth into fellowship with error so that the only way Fundamentalists could be separated from error was to separate from the New Evangelicals.

These two things, an absolute confidence in the integrity of the Word of God and a determination to maintain purity in doctrinal belief is what Fundamentalism is all about. Faithful men have fought valiantly throughout church history to preserve the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. They did so because the Bible teaches them to do so. There is tremendous pressure today to give up this pursuit and to give in to the spirit of conciliation that so permeates the visible church. The faithful must not give in. Once you start on the path of compromise, there is no turning back. Once you demonstrate a willingness to concede on one doctrine, pressure will continue until you concede them all. *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle* (II Thessalonians 2:15). *Hold fast the faithful word as you have been taught, that you may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers* (Titus 1:9). *...Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3b). *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world* (I John 4:1). *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe* (I Thessalonians 2:13). *And all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine....* (II Timothy 3:16). *So, preach the word...with all longsuffering and doctrine* (II Timothy 4:2). *If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou has attained* (I Timothy 4:6).

Fundamentalists, heed the Word! 

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A Final Word

The unity movement used to be confined to the more liberal elements of Christianity and was known as ecumenism. Today, however, there is an evangelical unity movement running parallel to the ecumenical movement and the two seem to be drawing ever closer to each other.

On March 29, 1994, a group of Christian leaders signed a declaration celebrating a “pattern of convergence and cooperation between evangelicals and Catholics in Christian faith, common cultural and social tasks, and evangelistic commitment”. The following are excerpts from the document:

There is a necessary connection between the visible unity of Christians and the mission of the one Christ. We together pray for the fulfillment of the prayer of Our Lord: “May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” (John 17) We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples.

The one Christ and one mission includes many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical. All Christians are encompassed in the prayer, “May they all be one.”

As Evangelicals and Catholics, we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ.

The mission that we embrace together is the necessary consequence of the faith that we affirm together.

The love of Christ compels us and we are therefore resolved to avoid such conflict between our communities and, where such conflict exists, to do what we can to reduce and eliminate it. Beyond that, we are called and we are therefore resolved to explore patterns of working and witnessing together in order to advance the one mission of Christ.

The document drones on and on about minimizing differences and facilitating cooperation. In order to accomplish this merger of Christians formerly divided along doctrinal lines, something has to change. Either doctrinal differences have to be resolved and replaced with a new doctrinal agreement, or some other alternative to doctrinal differences must be discovered.

Sadly, the latter is what has occurred. Instead of coming together on the basis of agreement, feeling has been substituted for belief. In spite of the claim that unity is being based upon the truth of the Word of God, a blind emotional attachment labeled “love” is offered as a replacement for doctrinal beliefs.

The contention of those who subscribe to the unity movement is that doctrine divides. Consequently, doctrine must be relegated to a back room so that it does not jeopardize the unity of the Church. Love, tolerance, understanding, and good will are the tenants upon which harmony among Christians must be built, so they say.

However, doctrine is the real catalyst to unity. If there is a single set of beliefs that serve as the unchangeable standard to which everyone must subscribe, all of those who do so will find themselves in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, no longer tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies according to the effective working in the measure of every part.

We must beware of any unity that is based upon the tolerance of differences rather than the solid compatibility of absolute agreement. We must be alert against the false doctrines that are subtly displacing truth, creating the appearance of unity in the arena of Christianity, yet destroying the very foundation that is necessary to the health of the church. There is no contradiction within God himself. There is no conflict of contradictory thoughts running through His divine mind. And, we can be certain that He intends the same to be true for the spiritual body of His Son which has been given the mind of Christ.

Let the walls of doctrine stand. They were erected because men walked away from the truth and used the building blocks of false doctrine to divide the church. As long as there is doctrinal error that needs to be identified among professing Christians, these walls should remain to provide a place on which to hang the warning signs.

May true Bible believers learn the process of rightly dividing the Word of truth, *till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:13-14). 