

I Will Build My Church

The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church

5 The Church is "One", "Holy", "Catholic", and "Apostolic", Part 4

February 16, 2020

Ephesians 4:4-16

4 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says, "*WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.*"

9 (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

To the Glory of God

Now over the last several weeks we have been looking at the four Characteristics of a true, biblical Church as defined by the Nicene Creed (AD325).¹ And this attempt by the early Church at arriving at “Orthodoxy” (Right Believing) was that a real Church was:

1. One
2. Holy
3. Catholic
4. Apostolic

And to try to grasp what the men, who led the Church some 1700 years ago, meant by the term “One”, we began to look at the four aspects that Dr. Luke was “carried along” by God the Holy Spirit to pen down in **The Acts 2:42** that actually made the Church to be “One” that says:

They [the people of the early Church] were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Here, Dr. Luke, who was commissioned by the Apostle Paul, tells us that the Church of Jesus was “**continually devoting**” themselves to four aspects:

1. The Apostle’s Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. The “Breaking of Bread” (the Lord’s Supper)
4. Prayer

... and these four aspects are what made the Church to be “One”.

So, last time, we finished examining what Luke meant when he talked about the “Apostle’s Teaching”. And so, today, I want to begin to look at the other three Attributes that Dr. Luke infallibly wrote as to just what made the early Church to be “One”.

¹ The Creed was updated in AD 381 at the *Council of Constantinople*; but the section concerning the Characteristics of an “Orthodox” Church remained the same.

2. Fellowship

The Acts 2:42b

They were continually devoting themselves to... fellowship...

Consistent times of godly Fellowship among believers was a hallmark of the early Church, and was used by the Holy Spirit to *promote* and *sustain* the "Oneness" of the Church by *encouraging* and *facilitating* Biblical Holiness and Faithfulness in the life of genuine believers through ongoing Accountability. Fellowship allows both the weaknesses of our flesh and the strengths of God's Spirit to emerge in a setting which is useful in illustrating a God honoring application of Scriptural Truth.

Hebrews 10:23-25

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

There are certain Sins and Weaknesses of the flesh that are common to *every* believer. But there are certain "struggles of the flesh" which are unique to specific groups. For example, all Men are certainly *not* the same. But there are certain aspects of Life with which *most* Men struggle. And, therefore, older, wiser, and more godly Men can offer younger and less experienced Men, or Men who are new converts, some very practical Encouragement which will *assist* in their effort to remain pure and unspotted by the world.

And the same thing applies to Women. All Women are *not* the same. But most Women struggle with certain aspects and temptations that are common to Females. And godly times of Fellowship will help to relieve those troubles as well. As the Scripture commands:

Hebrews 10:24b

... let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

So, part and parcel to actually *obeying* this part of the Bible and conducting times of Fellowship that are productive and edifying is that

we “**consider**”, we *ponder*, or we spend time *thinking* about just *how* we can *facilitate* godly times of Fellowship among ourselves so that the end result will be that we “**stimulate one another to love and good deeds**”.

This effort to build the “Oneness” in the Church through Fellowship can be done in any number of ways:

- Eating *together*
- Praying *together*
- Studying Scripture *together*
- Working *together*

... but the common theme of them all is the word “together”. We simply have no idea how to encourage one another and hold each other accountable unless we are *together*. And this Church, especially, struggles with this Issue due to the great distances between us. Yet, as we strive to obey, God will help us to do what His Word commands.

But as we find ways to gather together, both informally and formally, we must always be careful that we do not “waste” this time of Fellowship by allowing it to disintegrate into being nothing more than a time to “chew the fat” or find out “how’s business”.

For example, many, in the modern American Church simply eat together, watch movies or sporting events together, or engage in hobbies (like pottery, exercise, etc.), and they call that effort “Fellowship”. But that isn’t the kind of “Fellowship” that the Scriptures promote. The effort to have various “groups” divided by Men/Women/Young People, etc., is at the discretion of the Elders of the local Church, but *some* of the things that should be included in a Biblical Church’s time of Fellowship would be:

- Teaching the Word
- Confession of sin
- Prayer for Forgiveness and Strength
- Holding each other accountable to Scriptural Obedience and Service
- Practical helps

The Goal of godly Fellowship was used in **The Book of the Acts** to promote the “Oneness” of the Church and to give practical Help to

believers with the various Issues of life over which they were struggling:

- Lost family members and friends
- Persecution
- Discouragement
- Disobedience
- Understanding and applying difficult Passages
- Pursuing biblical Holiness

... and so, *whatever* method that the Church Elders decide to use to facilitate these times of godly Fellowship must be to the end to promote these values.

Also, there are two things are *always* required for Fellowship to actually work:

1. People have to be willing to *lead* these times of Fellowship.
2. People have to be willing to *participate*.

3. The Lord's Supper (Communion)

The Acts 2:42c

They were continually devoting themselves to... the breaking of bread...

Now the term “**the breaking of bread**” was used in the 1st Century to discuss genuinely saved people promoting the “Unity”, or the “Oneness,” of the local Church by partaking of the Lord's Supper or Communion on an ongoing and continual basis.

The Lord's Supper is one of only two Divinely Commanded “Ordinances” or “Sacraments” which the Christian Church partakes regularly until the return of the Lord, the other being the Baptism of believers by full emersion.

It is clear from both Scripture and Church History that the early Church partook of the Lord's Supper more frequently than is done by many in the modern Church. But, however regularly the Elders of a particular Church decide to partake of The Lord's Supper, it should meet that Biblical pre-requisite:

...continually devoting...

So, the criteria is that in a Biblical Church there must be a “**devoting**” to this Attribute, or a purposeful, serious, and meaningful partaking of the Lord’s Supper. And that “partaking” must be “**continual**” or ongoing which will facilitate the Unity or the “Oneness” of the Church.

4. Prayer

The Acts 2:42d

They were continually devoting themselves to... prayer.

It is true that every believer should pray and pray “**without ceasing**” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But a Church will promote the Biblical “Unity” or the “Oneness” by engaging in formal, regular, ongoing, and consistent times of Corporate Prayer (the entire Church).

And that time of Corporate Prayer should not be confused with the “Midweek Services” found in many Churches across the land today in which actual Prayer is a very small and insignificant part.

History tells us that Prayer was the aroma of the early Church. And it helped to make the Church “One”. So, when they were frightened, they prayed. When they experienced a great victory, they prayed. When they were confused, they prayed. When threatened by the Government, they prayed. They prayed, they prayed, they prayed! O, how they prayed! And even though the details of just *how* to accomplish this “continual devotion to prayer” are *not* specifically taught in Scripture and are left up to the Elders of the local Church to determine, a Biblical Church will nonetheless meet those two Biblical per-requisites:

- A. Prayer will be *continual* and *ongoing* in the Church.
- B. The people of the Church will be *devoted* to Prayer.

So, we can see from this that whatever it did look like, Prayer was *not* an afterthought, or something that they did “before” and “after” something else, but was the center of attention in the early Church.

Prayer was a *priority*. And Prayer should be a priority in any Church endeavoring to be Biblical.

Biblical Unity Versus Individual Uniformity

Christ's Church has always been, is now, and should always remain "One". And by understanding and obeying the Biblical Pattern, it will be. But we must remember that the goal here is "Biblical *Unity*" (Oneness), *not* "Individual *Uniformity*". And that distinction is not merely semantic, but is huge and important because Biblical Unity honors God and brings Joy and Satisfaction to the children of God while Individual Uniformity *dishonors* God, it stifles creativity, and brings people under Man-made hindrances and barriers to true Joy.

For example, it should be the desire of all believers to dress modestly, with care and concern that the way in which we all dress promotes God-given Beauty and Handsomeness while mortifying sinful pride and lust. So, Biblical Unity about that issue will accomplish the Biblical Command of Modesty. As the Apostle Peter taught in **1 Peter 3:1-4**:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be *merely* external — braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

So, in this case, the Goal of the people of a Biblical Church is simply the type of Modesty that Scripture teaches with complete freedom to accent and promote graceful and dignified Beauty and Femininity in all of its various forms.

But true, biblical Unity will *never* descend into Man-made, extra-Biblical "dress standards" which *expect* and *demand* individual *Uniformity* as to the length of skirts and sleeves, etc.

The same thing is true about the Issue of "Worldliness"². Worldliness is a *terrible* Sin, and it is very *destructive* to the Cause of

² **1John 2:15-17**. Please see the Sermon Series, "*Whatever Happened to Worldliness?*"

Jesus Christ. Yet there is no “one size fits all” solution to the problem of Worldliness. It must be left up to the individual believer and God. And so, for example, whether a believer allows *some* or *no* television programming into his home simply CANNOT and SHOULD NOT be dictated by the Church or any other group or person. History teaches us that every attempt (most of them noble) at regulating this Issue, *externally*, ends up with the horror of “Legalism”, which is, many times, far *worse* than the Worldliness it seeks to correct.

Why all the Denominations?

Many times, as we examine the unique Unity and “Oneness” that exists in Christ’s Church, we look over the landscape and see tens of thousands of groups, sects, and denominations which all claim to be teaching the Truth, and yet differ from one another. Many times, the Roman “system” lays claim to be in Unity while they say the “failed” aspects of Protestantism has descended into many various groups. But their complaints are simply not true. There are literally *hundreds* of divisions within the Roman “covering” which differ from one another as well.

So, the visible Church on the earth seems, on the surface, to be very splintered, and very divided, and not enjoying this unique “Oneness” that the Bible describes. So, what should we make of that? Has Christ been defeated? Has Christianity failed? Has Jesus’ Prayer in **John 17** been left unfulfilled? No.

Christ’s Church is “One” in the Essential Truths we believe in, trust in, and confess. And so, while we may differ on some second or third tiers Issues, all those who are saved today have been saved the very *same* way:

- By Grace ALONE
- Through Faith ALONE
- In the finished Work of Christ ALONE

... or they simply are NOT saved. And all genuine believers in the 21st Century are in complete Unity on other Essential Issues such as:

- The Nature and Characteristics of God the Father

- The Person and Work of Jesus the Christ
- The Nature and ongoing Ministry of God the Holy Spirit
- The Grace of God

... all within the one, single Godhead.

So, even with all the divisions and splinters (of which there are far too many), there is tremendous Unity among those who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth.³

Yet, based on this supposed failure of the visible Church to be "United", there are many efforts, every several years, which seek to *unite* the Body of Christ, all of which have, to this date, come to naught. So why is that? Is Christ's Church *hopelessly* divided?

Perhaps we need to look at this Issue from a different perspective. One of the *best* ways to understand the division in the visible Church is to comprehend that there is a huge difference between the *visible* Church and the *invisible* Church, a *distinction* between those who physically sit on the pews of a local church and those who faithfully follow Jesus. There is a *separation* between those who *say* they are saved from those who really are. And there is a *difference* between those churches that seek to be found faithful to Scripture and those who exist for a number of other reasons.

Because we are fallen creatures, we have the capacity to be deceived about a whole host of Issues, *especially* about our own spiritual standing with God. And that is why the ongoing Means of Grace, like Bible Study, Fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and Prayer, were given: to help us KNOW whether we are truly born-again people or not. And those who have genuinely experienced the Miracle of the New Birth are a part of Christ's One, Invisible Church. And those who have not, aren't, even if they physically are a part of the visible church.

So, Christ's Church, the *true* Church, the Church over which Jesus is Head, and not Man, the Church which seeks to be found faithful, the Church which strives to know and understand the Word of the Lord, the Church which is truly regenerate and obedient, *that* Church is "One", and that Church is *already* "One", it has *always* been "One", it has never *not* been "One", and that Church will *always* will be "One".

³ Because of very shallow Teaching in our day (and the minimization of the importance of biblical Truth), it is possible for a person to be "in agreement" (One) with Essential Truth, and yet not be able to articulate it very well, or at all.

Romans 12:4&5

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Corinthians 10:17

Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

Ephesians 2:14-16

For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might

reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Now we must agree that these verses are *not* describing what *should* be, or what *might* be, if only we do something different or fix something, or what *could* be if only we prayed certain prayers. These verses describe what *already is*, and what has *always been*, and *what will always be* until Christ returns, Christ's Church is "One".

And yet, we see division. So how are we to reconcile the fact that Christ's Church is "one", and yet there are great divisions? I offer two suggestions:

1. The Oneness of Christ's Church is not Organizational.
2. Unity Must be Pursued and Maintained Within the Truth, not Absent from Truth.

Let's examine them both briefly.

1. The Unique Oneness of Christ's Church is *not* Organizational

The great Reformed Pastor and Theologian, Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, said:

“A mere coalition of organisations or denominations has in reality nothing whatsoever to do with this unity. Indeed it may even be a danger. The unity that our Lord is concerned about is a unity which is spiritual. It consists of a

unity of spirits, and it is a unity, therefore, which is based solidly upon the Truth”⁴

James Montgomery Boice echoed that by saying:

“This unity... is not organizational, where everyone must be forced into the same denomination. The worst times in the history of the Church have been when everyone has been part of one large organization. It is not that kind of unity. The unity for which Jesus prayed is a unity patterned on the unity of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. That is, it is a unity of mind, will, love, and purpose.”⁵

By the understanding that the Unity and “Oneness” of the Church is *not* organizational, but spiritual, we see that not only *can* we be united, but if we are truly in Christ, we *are* united. His Spirit lives in all true believers and unites us in Truth, Love, and Purpose.

2. Unity Must be Pursued and Maintained Within the Truth, not Absent from Truth

Many people today echo the mantra “Doctrine Divides”, and use that slogan as a reason why we must seek after Unity *apart* from Truth. But the Question that must be answered is, “*If genuine believers are not united around Truth, around what are we united?*” And far too often all that is left is music and personalities, which is why those sincere but misguided efforts fail rather quickly. RC Sproul said:

“Many in the modern church would like to say, ‘One Lord, many faiths, and many baptisms’. But the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, insists that the one true Church has but one Lord and one faith one baptism and a single Salvation- not many.”

Dr. Sproul went on to say:

“Yes, Truth divides: it divides the sheep from the goats; it divides the gospel from heresy; it divides the Christ from the antichrist... Our culture preaches

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Growing in the Spirit: The Assurance of Our Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), ppg 138-40

⁵ James M Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), page 92

the doctrine of justification by a contentless faith. That is not Christianity; that is not Biblical Faith.”⁶

Richard Phillips has said:

“The true Church is not divided, Paul insists, for there is one church, one body. We have unity, but are now called to maintain and serve it, **“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)**. If we are to do this- we must rightly discern the boundaries of Christian Unity and Truth. If there is one church with one faith- then we must be prepared to discern what is the content that defines the boundary between brother Christians and false professors. With whom do we have unity? This is what we must discern.”⁷

Scriptural Truth rightly preached, taught, and explained, and correctly understood, and humbly and faithfully applied, unites infinitely more than it divides, because it only divides between those who joyfully submit to its Divine Authority and those who refuse. On what basis would a genuine believer argue with God about what God said? On what authority would a truly regenerate soul reject what God has said?

On the contrary, the great damage that has been done in the modern Church is *not* due to too much Biblical Doctrine being preached, but from the *lack* of it. The ignorance of God’s Will and Word that abounds in many of those who lay claim to being saved today is *not* from being taught the Bible too much, but from not being taught enough or at all. The struggle that many who name the Name of Jesus go through is because they honestly do not know what God’s Will is concerning serious matters is *not* from doctrinal Precision, but from the *absence* of it. As the Old Testament Prophet rightly proclaimed:

Hosea 4:6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

⁶ RC Sproul, “One O’er All the Earth,” in *Onward Christian Soldiers: Protestants Affirm the Church*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999) , ppg 212-13

⁷ Richard Phillips, *The Church; One; Holy Catholic; and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004) page 29

At a time when the most biblically illiterate generation of Church Leaders are blindly leading those who cannot see, we should not fear *too much* Doctrine, but we should welcome and be very eager to be taught timeless Truths from the Holy Bible which will strengthen our hands and keep our hearts. And as we delve deeper and deeper into Scripture, our already existing Unity will become more and more apparent.

We must remember that those “religious groups” which have Man as head, and not Christ, those “ecclesiastical systems” which are not concerned with being faithful, those “Man-made organizations” which do not strive to know and understand the Word of the Lord, those “False Converts” which are deceived about regeneration and are disobedient, those “Blind groups” are simply NOT a part of Christ’s Church. And they never will be a part unless and until they repent and return to their First Love:

The Revelation 2:2-5

I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.

The Revelation 2:13-16

I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of* immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

The Revelation 2:19-29

I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed *of sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them — I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, **TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES**, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Revelation 3:1-6

I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The Revelation 3:8-13

I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie — I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of

testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Revelation 3:15-22

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

These Warnings from the Mouth of our Savior should make us all tremble. And they should be the Cause of us, *ongoingly*, putting forth great effort to "Get the Gospel Right", lest we find ourselves at odds with Jesus.

Different Levels of Truth

But does the Church being "One" mean that the very concept of "Denominations" is wrong? Maybe, but maybe not. It depends on what the *basis* of the Denomination is. For example, if the *basis* of a particular religious group is a patently *unbiblical* Teaching (like rejecting the Deity of Jesus Christ), then I would suggest that you really don't have a Denomination at all, but a pagan cult, and, therefore, the division and separation brought about by them being "unique" and

distinct from the true Church is a wonderful thing so that as few people as possible will be deceived by their aberrant Teaching.

However, if the *basis* of a particular Denomination is merely their distinctive way in which to *apply* an orthodox Truth of Scripture (like the mode and method of Baptism), then, again, the Division created by that Denomination would be a good thing in the sense that this division allows others to view that application and to judge it on the merits to see if it is something that they would need to accept or reject.

All genuine denominational Distinctions are supposedly based on *how* to understand and apply the Divine Truth of Scripture. So, perhaps a good way to look at the various “differences” put forth by the various Denominations would be to make a distinction between the three levels of Biblical Truth:

Level 1 Those “Essential Truths” that involve clear and precise Apostolic Teaching about which there can be no disagreement, compromise, or unclarity.

Level 2 The vague, unclear, or non-essential Truths and practical suggestions on *how* to *apply* the Truths of Scripture to the daily lives of believers.

Level 3 A much more refined position of the non-essential Truths and additional suggestions of application.

Level 1 Truth

So using this criteria, an example of “Level 1 Truth” would be those various Biblical Teachings which would determine the Character and Nature of God, the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how lost unworthy sinners are rescued from God’s Wrath (saved).

These are Truths which define Biblical Christianity and the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and which define who is and who is not a true believer. These are Truths which define who is going to Heaven. Without clearly understanding and believing these Truths, you do not have genuine Salvation. Those who understand and believe and confess these Truths are saved, and are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Those who either do not understand them or who reject these

Truths are lost, and are *not* counted as members of the true Body of Jesus Christ (the Church).

For example, a person who clearly understands and who honestly believes that Salvation occurs based on what that individual sinner does for *himself* (whether that is partaking of Communion or speaking in tongues or being baptized or flying airplanes through buildings in a legally declared jihad, or performing "good deeds", etc.), would *not* be considered to be a true believer by Biblical Standards, and, thus, is *not* saved. That person is *not* a Christian. This individual is deceived by false Teachings and doctrines of demons, no matter how passionately or sincerely he may hold to those Teachings. And a person like that does NOT need to be included in Membership, he needs to be saved.

The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that Salvation is wholly a Sovereign Work of God, and is accomplished in individual sinners "by" Grace (ALONE) and "through" the Gift of "saving Faith" (ALONE) in Jesus, *personally*, and in His finished Work (ALONE), and is *not* the product of any humanly initiated Effort (Work).

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that (Faith is) not of yourselves, *it* (the gift of saving Faith) *is* the gift of God; not as a result of (any humanly engineered or initiated) works, so that no one may boast (take glory or credit). For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (after we are saved). (explanation added)

The Biblical distinction between God's Grace and Human Works is that we are initially saved "by" Grace through the sovereign Gift of Faith. And that "saving Faith" is *not* inherently "of ourselves", but is "the Gift of God". And so, because we have been truly saved, we are transformed, and supernaturally and miraculously empowered and enabled to "do" Good Works which are simply the loving and humble Response that all genuine believers have to already being saved.

So humanly engineered or initiated Works (i.e., Obedience/Bearing Fruit, etc.) are not the "root" of Salvation, they do not "bring about" or *cause* Salvation, but rather, they are the "fruit" or the "unmistakable proof" that this person has *already* been saved by Grace through Faith.

So, the individual who genuinely believes that he is saved by what he can and must do for himself is *not* truly saved at all, and is deceived. Therefore, he is *not* a brother in Christ, and he is *not* going to Heaven because he is *not* a genuine believer.

Therefore, those religious Organizations which *reject* these Essential Truths, or which believe and teach unbiblical falsehoods about this Level of Truth, are *not* Christian, they are *not* a true Church, and the doctrinal Distinctions (Denominations) which clearly articulates the separation between those heretical Organizations and a true Biblical Church are necessary and helpful.

Level 2 Truth

A good example of "Level 2 Truth" would be in the area of Baptism. For example, you have some Denominations who, after carefully and prayerfully analyzing what the Scriptures teach, come to the honest conclusion that they should "baptize" or "christen" babies by sprinkling, while others, who just as carefully analyze the very same Scriptures, honestly come to the conclusion that Baptism should be limited to only genuine believers by emersion. And while that Disagreement is certainly not optimal, it deals with a very important, but peripheral (secondary), Issue, and *not* an Issue which would undermine or neglect or contradict an Essential Truth of Scripture like Salvation or the Deity of Christ.

So, a person could be truly saved and a co-laborer in the Gospel, and yet differ from another genuine believer in this area. So, while everyone must agree with "Level 1 Truth", genuine believers may disagree on "Level 2 Truth" and remain united on the "Level 1 Essentials." This kind of Disagreement does not, in any way, defeat the Church's "Oneness", although we should continue to labor to find a biblical Solution to it. Because even though a Disagreement on "Level 2 Truth" does not negate the "Oneness" of Christ's Church, it isn't okay. And so, great effort should be expended to *overcome* the impasse.

And while people who agree completely with "Level 1 Truth" while disagreeing on some of the "Level 2" Issues would remain fellow Christians, and could co-operate in many joint efforts (Conferences, Meetings, etc.), it would probably be disruptive if those who disagree on

“Level 2 Truth” were to be members of the same local church, unless great care was taken to overcome those objections.

Level 3 Truth

An example of “Level 3 Truth” would be a more refined understanding and more unified application of certain non-essential issues which would be important to the Leaders of an individual church as they live before and shepherd the local flock. A disagreement about these issues among the Leaders of a local Body could bring confusion to the people, so great care should be made for the Leaders to more deeply and fully understand the important issues and to apply them in a more unified way among themselves.

So, I think it is important for us to understand that the Christ’s Church is NOT going to *become* “One” at some point in the future as long as we can cast off all the things that may divide us. No, Christ’s Church is “One” right now. It has *always* been “One”, and it will *always* be “One”. Christ’s Church has never NOT been “One”. And so, if we hope to be a part of *that* Church, Christ’s Church, the true Church, we must work very hard and pray very hard to come into alignment with Jesus and His Word.

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.