

**DIVIDING
GOD'S
CHURCH**



**BY
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Forward

The crowd anxiously awaited the newly appointed king to arrive in order to formerly justify his crown. It seemed the entire nation had gathered in the small community of Shechem and rumors circulated wildly through the congregation. Jeroboam was there. He had recently returned from Egypt where he had been in hiding from Solomon. Now that he had died, Jeroboam felt brave enough to come home and he had been stirring up the people, particularly those from the Northern tribes of Israel.

Finally arriving, Rehoboam, son of Solomon, stood before the people. But a question arose and was voiced by none other than Jeroboam. *"Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you."* (1 Kings 12:4). Indeed, Solomon, in all the buildings he had constructed, including the temple, his own house, and all the houses for his foreign wives, along with the vast army he had gathered, the burden, both physically and financially, had been very exacting.

In my opinion, the answer should have been simple and immediate. Anyone with any sense should have known that to answer the people favorably would have been the right choice. But Rehoboam wasn't sure of what to do. He wanted to consult his advisors and so he told the people to return three days later for his answer.

After consulting with his father's trusted advisors, the correct and obvious answer was suggested. "Agree to give the people what they wanted and they will serve you," was their counsel. But Rehoboam wasn't satisfied.

Rejecting the counsel of the elder advisors, he went to a group of his own peers who foolishly told him to tell the people that “my little finger will be thicker than my father’s waist,” in other words, “you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!” I will be much harsher with you than he was.”

When he echoed the advice given by his younger peers, the people were angered and, under the leadership of Jeroboam, the Northern tribes revolted. The kingdom was divided without hope of restoration.

It never ceases to amaze me how those whom God has chosen insist on using their differences to bring division. When we are supposed to be witnesses to the world of unity under the rulership and authority of God Almighty, we ultimately bring division before the eyes of the world.

Yes, the world is watching. Their critical magnifying glass is constantly on those who claim to be children of God. They look to see just what we can display that will give them hope that there is an answer to the conflict all around them. But when we instead show differences – differences to the point of dividing God’s Church, then the witness has been murdered.

People are skeptical enough already for us to show them further reason to doubt what Christ can do in their lives. The devil doesn’t want them to be changed. He only wants to bring confusion and he always has. Then we, who are supposed to be showing the world our witness by our love, only cause further reason for doubt.

This book is dedicated to the sole purpose of exposing our areas of division and, hopefully provide a remedy. Of course, it will take more than my word. It will take all of us who know Jesus Christ as Savior to unite and regain hope into our witness. We can do it. But it will take all of us.

Chapter 1

THE BIRTH OF GOD'S CHURCH

In the dingy lit room men were quietly waiting. For what, they weren't certain, not yet anyway. The odor of men in need of a bath rose in the air as they had been there for ten days now. There were one hundred and twenty of them (Acts 1:15). The first day had been much different than it was at this moment. They had been excited to wait, to watch and act in obedience to the words of their Risen Savior. It was, apparently, the upper room where they had recently eaten the Passover meal with Jesus (Acts 1:13). But now they grew tired; tired of the wait, tired of the heat, the dark and the odor.

But Jesus had told them to wait (Acts 1:4). Wait? Yes, for the promise of the Father which He said, "You have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (verse 5). They weren't certain exactly what He meant by that but they had learned, finally, to know that when He told them something significant like this that they needed to be obedient. And so, they remained, not really knowing what to expect, but definitely knowing that they would recognize it when it happened.

It had been ten days since Jesus had told them these words and had ascended into the sky on a cloud, and now it was the Day of Pentecost, fifty days since they had eaten the Passover with their Master. They knew that they should be partaking of the Holy Day events like all the others then in Jerusalem. They could hear the festivities in the streets below. It was the celebration of the wheat harvest that had been commanded by God to Moses centuries before. But He had said to wait, and they were committed to obey their Lord's command.

In the stale, hot air of the upper room, a movement was felt, gently at first, a welcomed breeze by all, but then it grew and, in a moment, it was the

sound of a very strong wind rushing through the room. Not only the upper room, but the entire house was filled with the noise and the strong wind, while outside the air was still.

In an instant, flickering flames, like cloven tongues of fire, rested on the heads of each of them and they began speaking words – words unknown to them. It seemed the house could not contain them and soon they were spilling out into the streets. Because of the feast, there were Jews from countries all over the then known world congregated in Jerusalem and strange words coming from the disciple's mouths were surprisingly understood by the people there, for they said, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?" (Acts 2:7-8). Others mocked them stating that they must be drunk.

It was Peter who spoke up. He had always done that. Many were the times when he had asked some silly question, or made a remark that prompted rebuke from the Master. He had been the one who had denied Jesus three times, cursing and swearing to his regret. He should have been the most unlikely to speak up, but Jesus had given private conversation with him the morning they had gone fishing after the Lord had risen. It seemed Jesus had forgiven him and appointed him to lead.

This time when he spoke up his words weren't dumb or selfish. This time he spoke with authority telling the people that they weren't drunk as they may have thought, since it was only 9:00 in the morning. No, this was what Joel had prophesied and he continued with a message that prompted repentance from the people. That day alone, their number went from 120 to more than 3000. It marked a new beginning. The Church had been born and was growing strong.

SALVATION IS FOR ALL

I will remember that night as long as I live. It was the night that God spoke to my heart letting me know that in nearly every congregation everywhere in the world, He had true, Bible-believing, faith-filled people who were born again just like I was. We had been raised up in a strict, holiness,

Pentecostal congregation. Now don't get me wrong; I'm not blaming them or accusing them of messing me up. They were only doing what they, themselves had been taught by those before them. But somehow, I had gotten the impression that unless you were saved and attending our congregation, or at least a sister congregation with our same beliefs, then you were not a Christian. I know that is twisted thinking. I've talked to others who had also been a part of that congregation who denied that they held that view so I'm not sure how I got that impression, but I did.

We had formed a youth choir and a lady that attended our congregation had gotten us an appointment on a Sunday night to sing at a Baptist congregation. Believing what I did at that moment made me feel like we were going into a mission field where everyone there needed to be saved. But I was wrong. Boy, was I wrong. The people there displayed the same belief in salvation that I did. The pastor brought a very well-studied sermon and right then and there the Lord let me know that He had believers all over the world who were not a part of the same congregation and sister congregations I attended. His Church was much bigger and much broader than my teenage mind could fathom.

God continued to teach me from that day forward. What I learned was that I had a lot of unlearning to do. My belief system, though inspired by many loving and well-meaning Christian people, was wrong in more ways than I wanted to admit. They had some things right, but a whole lot of things wrong. I fell in love with the Bible, began studying every moment I could get, and I haven't stopped for, well, at this writing it's been fifty-four years. I can tell you right now, I don't think it is possible to graduate from the study of the Bible, not, at least, until we actually get to Heaven and hear it from our Father Himself.

DON'T PROFANE WHAT IS GOD'S

The booming voice from the sky along with the thunder and lightning, frankly terrified those who heard, all except for their leader, Moses. At the first giving of the Ten Commandments, God spoke them in the hearing of all the people of Israel (see Exodus 20). The people were so terrified that they asked Moses to ask God if He would only talk to them through Moses from then on. God acknowledged that it was the best idea, frankly I believe,

because the Holy Spirit had not come and they were not ready for such remarkable things as hearing directly from God. The point was, however, that in the first giving of the “big ten” God made certain that all the people heard, so that there was really no excuse when they broke them only forty or so days later.

It was after this that the Bible tells us that Moses went into the thick darkness where God was speaking (Exodus 20:21). The first thing God said to Moses was to let the people know that they were not to make any false gods of silver or gold (which was the first thing they did when they thought Moses wasn't coming back down from the mountain). The second thing God told them was that when they constructed an altar on which to sacrifice to Him, that they were to make it of simple earth or of uncut stones. He later gave Moses implicit instruction on how to build the altar of sacrifice that would be a part of the tabernacle. That was different from the altars that He was referring to here. He said, “An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” (Exodus 20:24-25).

The point I wish to make from this is found in the last few words where God plainly tells man that when he touches it with his tools, he profanes it. I believe that this is what man did with God's Church. In the New Testament God gave specific offices to serve and provide leadership for His Church. He also established simple rules to follow – Rules that were not impossible nor would rob His people of their freedom in Christ. Just as man was to not profane the ancient altars of sacrifice, when Christ became the ultimate sacrifice for sin, doing away with animal sacrifice, He didn't want man to defile His Church.

But man did anyway. Just as Israel sinned even before Moses could climb down from Mount Sinai, almost immediately man began to organize, govern and bring his own order to God's wonderful Church. Anytime man puts his hands on the sacred ordinances of God, he defiles it and, in plain language, wrecks it.

GOD HAS A PLAN

God had a plan. From the very beginning He knew when He created mankind, that He would have to take human form and die in the place of men to pay for their sin. When He did, He started a new thing called "The Church." The Greek word is "ecclesia" meaning the out-called or called out assembly. This is the Greek word used for "Church" in every instance found in the Bible except for in Acts 2:47. That verse says "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." In Greek it reads literally, "Praising the God and having favor toward whole the people the yet Lord added the ones being saved according to day on the same." The Greek word used in this instance is "sOzomenous" – "the ones being saved." It refers to the same thing. "Ecclesia" speaks of the collection of the out-called ones while "sOzomenous" is also a group - those being saved. It is never used in the Bible to define a structure. It is not a building. It is those who are called out.

In the use of the "Church" in the Bible it is often referred to as the "church" in someone's house. In only one instance is there mention of "The House of God." 1 Timothy 3:15 says "But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." There is nothing in this verse which is actually referring to a building separate from a home. The reference "the House of God" could well have been like all the gatherings at that time, namely in someone's home. It is referring to God's people. We are the "house of God." Wherever God's people gather, whether in a building, someone's home, or under a tree in the backyard, that assembly is "The House of God."

Church buildings did not appear in history until during the 3rd century AD. The earliest known building referred to as a church was found at Dura Europos on the Euphrates River and it is thought to have appeared between 285 and 300 AD. Actually, until the time of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, when Christianity was finally accepted by the Romans, public meetings of Christians were a target for all her enemies. So, believers met

in individual homes or sometimes the catacombs where the Roman dead were buried. Because of Roman superstition, believers were untouched in these areas.

However, in today's church world, when we use the word "church" the first thing most of us think of is a building. "Where is your church located?" "Where do you go to church?" "What kind of church do you attend?" These are questions that people relate to in today's church world. But the Church was never meant to be thought of in these terms. In New Testament times the word "Church" whether used in a broad sense, or in reference to a local congregation, it always was referring to the people – the called-out ones – who gathered to worship.

In terms of leadership, in our modern era it seems that there is a very broad use and definition of elders and bishops. Our organized church promotes these leaders over the people. If you look up the history of elders and bishops you will find that most feel like these were basically one in the same. But no one really knows for certain. I too have an opinion regarding elders and bishops. In the New Testament these offices are outlined in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. These are called the Pastoral Epistles and are so called due to the instruction from Paul to these two men, as to how those holding these offices should act.

This is not in the Bible so I am not presenting it as necessarily scriptural. Knowing the history of the gatherings of the Church I believe that there was only one Church (this is scriptural by the way). However, in the early Church, as we have established above, there were no buildings in which to meet until the 3rd century AD. So, the Church in each city met in individual homes. You can see the evidence of this throughout the New Testament. The pastor of the city-Church couldn't possibly preach and oversee each home congregation and so I believe that elders were appointed over each home gathering and served under the pastor or bishop of that city. It makes sense to me and accurately defines the purpose and responsibility of those appointed in these offices. The word "elder" in the Greek is "Presbuterou" and refers to a senior. This person was not necessarily older than everyone else but senior in the aspect of leadership. The word "bishop" is the Greek word "episkopes" meaning "supervisor." This would have been the individual over the city congregation.

The Modern Church is made up of huge, expensive buildings that require large budgets to sustain and support them. It is my opinion that perhaps God never intended for us to meet in buildings, but to stay simple and meet in home groups. Think of the funds that could be redirected toward real human needs; hunger, poverty, the homeless, the sick and those bound by habits and addictions. But our funds are largely used to support paid leaders and pay the mortgages and bills of the brick-and-mortar structure. The Bible is silent when it comes to this subject. It does not say that we shouldn't have separate buildings but neither does it instruct us to build such edifices.

As far as those paid leaders of congregations, Paul did tell us that the workman is worthy of his hire. This allows for full-time servants. However, most early Church leaders were not paid. So, once again this is not scripture but it is my opinion that the out-called, the Church, maybe would have been better off had they stayed in individual homes.

Although there were disagreements in the early Church, the Apostles, in their letters to the Church, were able to bring teaching and resolve. If our modern-day Church would follow the instructions found in the New Testament it would fix a lot of problems. Until our Lord returns there will be situations and disagreements because we are human. However, the devil rejoices in bringing division to God's Church.

God never intended for His Church to be split into different factions. In fact, it was taught that all problems be resolved. Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15-17, *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'* And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." This is how Jesus taught us to resolve our differences and if the Church would follow His words, we could avoid divisions birthed from disagreement, hatred, and bickering.

Today we have congregations splitting up over menial and petty differences. Even the major differences could be resolved if stubborn people would diligently seek what the Bible actually says instead of insisting on their own private interpretations. The sooner God's people realize that His word

only means one thing, and we study it out and conform to it, so that we might avoid confrontations, hurt feelings, break-ups and splits, the better off we will be. It is high time that men stop dividing God's Church. I contend that the only good congregational split is one that is a result of growth, where a group moves to another location to start another congregation supported by the original one.

In this book we will address these things that bring division. Again, I don't know everything and if anyone can scripturally refute my teaching I will gladly conform to the word of God and publicly retract what I have written. But an occasional scripture will not serve to refute. We must look at the entire Bible and what it says completely on a given subject.

The main events that have brought division to God's Out-Called are these:

The split between Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholicism

The split of the Catholic Church and Protestantism

Denominationalism in the Protestant Church

Congregations in the same city that do not associate with each other and compete for attendees.

The teachings regarding the Trinity and Oneness (Jesus Only or Apostolic)

The division of clergy and laity

The opposing teachings of Arminianism and Calvinism.

In this study we will examine all of these events and occurrences that have brought division to God's Church. Over the years it has been my experience that the truth nearly always resides somewhere in the middle of the opposing doctrines. Some of each teaching is true while some of each teaching is false. When it comes to studying the scripture, many have taken the stance that God gives different interpretations to different people. While there could be some minor instances of this, for the most part the Bible only means one thing. Because of our hard hearts we have claimed that God has

revealed it one way to us and so it must be that way. However, over the years God has showed me that I have been wrong many times about the interpretation of the Bible. It means one thing and we must strive to make our lives conform to what the Bible actually means rather than what we have been taught, stubbornly holding to our preconceived ideas and teachings. When we do, we can find the true meaning of the scripture and as I have already said, the truth generally is made up by parts of the teaching of both sides.

I would rather be outcast by both sides of these doctrines rather than not speak the truth of the word of God. In fact, as a watchman on the wall, it is my life-or-death duty to do so. And so, we begin . . .

Chapter 2

THE CATHOLIC DIVISION

The men sitting around the table listened intently to the one speaking. It was Jesus. They were eating what we have labeled “The Last Supper.” It was toward the end of the meal. Jesus had washed the feet of all the disciples, including those of His betrayer, Judas Iscariot. He had identified His betrayer to John by saying that it would be the one to whom He gave a piece of dipped bread. He dipped it and handed it to Judas. Then telling Judas to do what he had to do quickly, his betrayer left to do the deed that caused him to be listed as the son of perdition.

After this Jesus began talking with the rest of them. The first thing He told them was one of the most important things ever spoken to His Church. He gave them instructions which would serve as the sure-fire sign of their discipleship. He told them, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35). It wasn’t a tattoo, a tee-shirt or necklace. It wasn’t an oath or signature on a membership card. It wasn’t their good works, though those were things that Christians should do. It wasn’t a secret handshake or a suit of clothes, or how they dressed, or how clean they were. It was one thing - How they loved and preferred each other.

The entire world, since the fall of Adam and Eve, has searched, sought, looked, hoped for and cherished the idea of this one thing; to find true love. Not sexual affection, not someone else who would serve them, but someone who would genuinely regard them, lift them up and be a true-blue friend – Someone they could constantly count on, who had their back no matter what. So, as the world searches for this true love, if they could find it then they would eagerly seek to follow it. Jesus knew this, after all, He was very God in the flesh. He knew that if His disciples could follow this one, new

commandment, that all the other commandments would fall in place behind it. As His disciples followed the new commandment, and acted on this love for one another, people saw the purity in what they taught and flocked to the newly founded Church.

In order to help the poorer disciples, the Book of Acts tells us "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." (Acts 2:45). It also says, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." (Acts 4:32-35). They were well on their way to genuinely loving each other.

But this angered the devil. The enemy of God and of our souls, knew that he must stop this before it got too far and began to tempt believers. If he could stop this love he could stop God's Church. Acts 5 tells us the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They too owned a piece of land. They saw how others had sold what they had and I believe began to envy the honor they had been given. They wanted the honor and respect but didn't really want to give up what they had. God hadn't said that they had to do this. They weren't required to sell it. But they wanted the best of both worlds and so they hatched a plan to sell their property and keep part of it back, letting the rest of the Church think that they had given it all. Their sin wasn't in keeping back part of it as much as it was in trying to be deceptive. They could have told the apostles that they were going to keep part of it and that would have been acceptable. But they wanted the same honor as the others who had given all. Thus, they lied to the apostles and ultimately the Holy Spirit. Their lie and deception cost them their lives.

From that moment on, although God still causes His Church to grow, the devil has tempted its members to be divided. Man's desire to be right, authoritative and knowledgeable, has caused multiple doctrinal divisions in

God's Church. Rather than studying together to find the pure truth, men insist on it being their way or the highway and so we cause division.

For the first three centuries the Church only suffered division from those insisting that Gentile Christians must follow the Old Testament Law. The Church proper had granted freedom to the Gentiles in Acts 15:22-29, but this didn't stop the Judaizers from trying to force their teaching on the new converts. There were others, such as the agnostics. You can read about these groups in other works on Christian history. However, this is a book on the dividing of God's Church so we won't repeat that information here.

Until 313 AD, severe persecution from several of the Roman emperors resulted in great persecution of the Church. Because these emperors decreed Christianity to be illegal, many were taken as common criminals and imprisoned, tortured, fed to lions, and some even burned as human torches to light the streets of Rome. In such intense persecution those claiming to be Christian would stand united rather than divided.

In 313 AD the battle for the throne of Rome between Constantine (who was empathetic to Christians) and Maxentius (who held to persecution of Christians) was won by Constantine. Nearly overnight Rome became tolerant of Christians but Constantine didn't take complete control of the throne until 323 AD and he made Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 350 AD.

Although some good came from this edict, bad evolved as well. Persecution stopped and Christianity became popular, so much that to be politically aligned, many converted to the faith in order to gain favor with the Roman Government. Constantine had moved the capitol of the empire from Rome to Constantinople and soon echoes of division began to resound in the Church. In the west (Rome) the Church was interwoven with government and the Church and State merged.

The Catholic church claims to be the first church, and in a sense, they are correct. Or, more accurately, they were the first church that derived from the original Church. They claim that Peter was the first Pope based on what Jesus said in regards to Peter in Matthew 16:18 which says: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates

of hades shall not prevail against it.” The situation around this verse was that Jesus had asked His disciples who people were saying that He was. Some had identified Him as a good teacher, others as one of the prophets from old who had been resurrected or incarnated in Jesus. He then turned to His disciples and asked them, “Who do you think I am?” That was when Peter, who was usually the first to speak up and speak his mind, said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (see Matthew 16:16). Jesus told him that he was blessed because flesh had not revealed this to him but the Father (God in Heaven). Then He spoke the quoted words above. The name, “Peter” literally means a rock. And so, the leadership of the Catholic Church claimed that these words, calling Peter a rock then stating that upon this rock the Church would be built, established him as the first Pope.

However, a closer look at the original Greek words used in this verse reveals that Peter is “Petros” in the Greek. The meaning of this word is “a piece of the rock” so Peter is a chip off the rock. The bigger rock (the word used is “Petra” which refers to a large rock or cliff) is the truth of the revelation of Jesus as the Christ. So, Jesus was actually saying that Peter was a small rock which came from the bigger rock – the truth of the revelation. Upon that revelation that He was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, would the Church be built, not on the smaller chip which was Peter.

For more than 700 years the Church continued. But because it was now the official religion of the Roman Empire, it began to change, to become more political and controlling of the people. Again, there are other books that outline the power the Church began to have over the people, both religiously and politically, and you can learn more by reading them. But for this teaching we can summarize by saying that the more power it gained over people, the less power it had with God. With the new capital of the Roman Empire in Constantinople, the Eastern part of the Church remained a bit more religious, while the western part of the Church continued to rise in power over governments and politics.

This dissention over the government of the Church led to the split of the Church. This was the first major division of God’s Church. It was made official in 1054 AD when the Pope’s messenger was laid on the altar of St. Sophia in Constantinople and the Roman church was excommunicated.

Eventually the papacy was developed and, particularly in Europe, the Church was led by a Pope, who was given such power that he was nearly equal with God. His authority came to become more important than the Bible itself. Because the Bible was still in Latin, the common people had no access to it. They depended on the Church leadership to tell them what it said. That, along with the given authority of the Pope, allowed for teachings to arise that our Lord, Jesus Christ never intended. Teachings like having to confess sin to a priest, rather than directly to God through Jesus Christ, praying to Mary and the saints as intercessors to God.

The teaching of Purgatory came into being around 1170 AD and was defined at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 AD for the first time. Its two points were defined as some saved souls needed to be purified after death; such souls benefit from the prayers and pious duties that the living do for them. Practices like lighting Votive Candles (which cost an offering to light the candles) was an intercession for loved ones in Purgatory. By the time Martin Luther came on the scene, the pope had begun issuing certificates guaranteeing loved ones would be released from Purgatory when the price of the certificate was placed in the collection trunk.

The communion, established by our Lord Jesus, who told us that as often as we did it, we did it in memory of Him, was called "The Mass" during which the belief was that the bread and wine were actually transformed into the body and blood of our Lord when it was placed in the mouth. These and many other teachings (such as holy water) came into being and the Gospel was replaced with sacraments, ritual and formalism.

This division of God's Church was the first major division. As you can see from the reading, it happened because men interjected their rulership and allowed it to replace the authority of the Bible and the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Once again, the touch of man profaned the good plan of God.

Chapter 3

REFORMATION

*I*t was a tough decision. As the lone figure climbed the steps leading to the door of the Wittenburg Castle church with intention of nailing a copy of the document containing 95 challenging objections. In essence, the Pope had started the practice of selling certificates of indulgence for the purpose of raising money to restore the basilica of St. Peter. He came up with the idea that the best way for subjects to guarantee the acceptance of their loved ones into Heaven was by purchasing a certificate of indulgence with the guarantee that their loved one would be freed from purgatory the moment the price of their indulgence clinked in the collection chest.

As he climbed those steps, he knew that his action would forever change his life and that from that moment on he would be looked down upon from the church leadership. Indeed, as you read the story of Martin Luther, you will learn that because of his discovery from the study of the Bible which taught salvation by grace, he was persecuted and finally excommunicated from the church.

He had not been the first to object to the way the church had digressed into an institution of man and that the simple membership had been so corrupted by man. Only by conforming to the teachings of those in leadership positions could one be in good standing. Anyone not conforming was looked down upon, excommunicated and in many instances executed for their trust in what the Bible said rather than what the leadership taught.

Luther wasn't the first. In 1170 two groups were highly persecuted because they disagreed with the dogmatic teachings of the church. The Albigenses (or Cathari) puritans were nearly wiped out because they disagreed. The Waldensians (followers of Peter Waldo), also called "the Poor Men of Lyons" were persecuted but thankfully protected in the area they lived.

John Wycliffe was the first to translate the Bible into the English language, but did so under intense scrutiny. The leadership of the church did not want the common people to be able to read the scriptures for themselves. If they did, they lost their control. His followers, called the Lollards, were severely persecuted.

There was John Huss from Bohemia, who was martyred in 1415 by being burned alive. Jerome Savonarola, preached reformation, but was martyred in 1498. He was first excommunicated by the Pope, then imprisoned, condemned, hanged and his body burned.

Other reformers included John Calvin, in France, Thomas Cranmer in England and John Knox in Scotland. These and many more were victims of persecution, excommunication and in many cases, execution only because they disagreed with the teachings of the corrupt church system that had evolved. Their only crime was that they wanted men to know the truth of the gospel.

In 1455, the Gutenberg press was invented and the very first full book to be printed was a German translation of the Bible. This changed things completely. For the first time the Bible could be printed in mass rather than meticulously by hand. It made it possible for more people to own a Bible and the Reformation was in full swing.

The Reformation was a major division of the Church. It was necessary because the church under the leadership of the Pope, had become corrupted, teaching things not taught by God. Controlling the lives of men and women and threatening excommunication from the Church (which meant they would not be candidates for Heaven), they were teaching the exact opposite of what the Church was meant to be.

I am convinced that God's perfect will would have been for the Church to return to His word, the simplicity of the gospel and put out those who taught against the love of the brethren as Jesus had taught. The Reformation had become necessary because men would not repent and return to God.

Thus, the Church was again divided. The Church that had been so persecuted by the Roman Empire, had now become the persecutor of the true Church. Once again people hazarded their lives simply for believing the

truth of the gospel. If you read Foxe's Book of Martyrs you will discover the stories of many who were killed simply for believing the truth and they were killed by the established church of man.

Today, people look at the tragic and bloody history of the Church, not in the light of the Church being persecuted, but how that the Church did the persecuting. In the name of the Church so called "holy wars" or Crusades were fought where many lives were taken in effort to recover the land of Israel. But war was not how Jesus meant for the world to be won. His was a war on sin, sharing the gospel to convert people into the Kingdom of God rather than capturing and forcing them in by politics.

The world, by and large, does not look favorably upon the Church because of what man has done in Her name over the centuries. Is it any wonder that those of the Muslim faith hate Christians so much? Our ancestors, in the supposed Name of Jesus tried to conquer them by killing them. They didn't tell them the Good News but told them to convert or die. That was what their religion had taught them so it was in essence no different. That being the case they would just keep on believing what they currently believed. Why should one convert from one system of dictatorship to another?

They didn't see the love for one another that Jesus taught, but the desire for power and might from soldiers proclaiming to be acting in the name of God. And so, the world, by and large, has come to hate Christianity because, once again, man put his filthy, dirty hands on the good and pure thing that God has designed.

Yes, the Reformation was necessary but even that didn't go far enough. We still held it in our own hands instead of releasing it into God's. Despite our foolishness, God still used what little man relinquished and souls were saved, and praise God for it. He has always had a remnant and He always will.

Chapter 4

DENOMINATIONALISM

“What church is she going to?”

I was determined to be mysterious about the congregation our granddaughter had chosen to attend. The obvious reason for this mystery was that I wanted to emphasize the wonderful news that she had come from what seemed to be a road of destruction, had repented of her sin, committed herself to the LORD and was getting baptized. What a change had taken place. She was saved from a life of hardship and sin and established as a believer in Jesus Christ.

As my wife and I shared this exciting news, the people we were talking to, rather than rejoicing in the true miracle that had taken place in our granddaughter's life, were more concerned about what denomination she was attending. Now don't get me wrong; the people we were sharing this with were Christians themselves, but because of denominational teaching, their first judgment would decide whether she was truly a believer based on the beliefs of the denomination she had chosen to attend.

I replied, “The Rock.” Which was the name the congregation had chosen for themselves. But that wasn't enough. It didn't tell them what they were pressing to find out. They kept asking questions until I finally had to tell them the denomination. To me it didn't matter. I have come to know that there are Christian people in every denomination. However, prejudice, false teaching, pre-conceived ideas and personal beliefs pushed them to believe that unless one attended a like-congregation to their own, they were not really saved and ready to go to Heaven. After my revelation as to which denomination it was, we were met with silence which actually screamed their belief that our granddaughter still had a way to go.

What is a denomination? There are two common meanings. One has to do with our American monetary system. The denomination is the bill value. For instance, the one-dollar bill is a one-dollar denomination while the one-hundred-dollar bill is yet another denomination. Other than the greed of some so-called pastors and ministers, this has nothing to do with the other meaning which has a religious connotation.

The reformation was a necessary, though, in my opinion, an unfortunate necessity. I believe God's perfect will would have been for the Church to repent of her digression to the formal, greed and control-driven institution it had become. If men would have repented and relinquished control back to God instead of continuing their desire for greed, control and authority over people, a great revival could have taken place and the Church could have once again been God's tool made up of the assembly of God's "called-out" ones.

But because they refused, they were driven from the established church and persecuted for their rebellion. They had discovered the truth and were endeavoring to return to the true worship of God and allow people to be saved by grace without confessing to a priest, or having to pay their loved one's way out of a made-up place referred to as Purgatory.

Because of a lack of unity, these individual groups started their own congregation and over time denominations were formed. I believe it would have been God's plan for these groups to unite, study for the truth of the interpretation of God's word and re-establish the great Church God had always intended.

As the Reformation grew stronger, many of the congregations that arose were nothing more than an official church of their individual countries. We are more concerned with the American church so we will use as example the Church of England. It was a Reformation church but in reality, mostly an English version of the Catholic Church. These reformed Catholic bodies in the individual countries still insisted on conformity and were, for the most part, intolerant of the non-Catholic beliefs.

The Church of England didn't go far enough in the reforming of the church and so a group known as the Puritans emerged. The name was a slanderous name given by those opposing their teachings but those in this group embraced the name. Again, this book is not meant as a history of the

Church so you can find more detail about this online or in books about Christian history. The purpose of mentioning them is to show how the migration to the United States led to the formation of several different denominations. From the Puritans came such groups as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and even the Quakers.

Back in England another group was emerging from the ministry of two brothers, John and Charles Wesley as well as George Whitefield. From their teaching came the Wesleyan-Methodist movement which later came to America.

Today, including different Catholic groups, there are more than 250 different denominations, some because of differing Biblical beliefs, and some merely disagreeing on Church Government.

Even though many have been saved, because God can use even what is broken to promote and further His Kingdom, it is tragic that the Church has splintered into so many factions. I know of two denominations (which shall remain unnamed) who strongly considered merging. Their teachings were identical. Their government was the same. The only reason that I know of, that caused them to remain separate was because they couldn't agree on what to call the newly formed organization. To me, that's tragic.

Are there good Bible-believing Christian people in these groups? Yes, of course there are. But here is the tragedy of denominationalism: non-believers are confused and frankly, frustrated and bewildered because of them. Who is right and who is wrong? One group says that the Bible means this and another that it means the opposite. The world sees these differences and, in their confusion, choose to not believe rather than go through even more conflict.

Thank God that these denominations have sent out missionaries resulting in great numbers coming to Jesus Christ. I want to be very careful to not minimize those facts. There have been great things done for the Kingdom of God by various denominations. Again, I will say that God always has a remnant, even when the Church is not doing exactly what she should be doing, God will use what she gives despite her failure.

The Reformation was a good thing. It was good not because it split apart from the Catholic Church but because it directed people back to God.

However, as I previously wrote, I believe it would have been God's perfect will for the Church to come back to Him rather than split. But the tragedy of it was that the division didn't stop. Instead of bringing the Church back as a single entity it continued to splinter with multiple beliefs and differences rather than uniting and working to know the truth of the Bible. Each group embraced their own interpretations and so division was made worse.

As we have said, the original Church met in individual homes for the most part. It is my personal belief that it should have stayed this way with each town and city having one pastor and each home group an elder presiding over it. I have also said that having a building isn't wrong except for the financial obligations associated with it. What is wrong is the competition between congregations meeting in these buildings. If we would work to understand the one true meaning of the Bible and unite to completely and genuinely love our brothers and sisters as Jesus intended, directing our finances to the true work of God, providing for the poor, widows and orphans and winning souls into the Kingdom, we would see much greater growth.

The Church needs no further name than it has ("The Church"). It has no need for the control of all the government and politics that have invaded God's perfect organization. "But don't we need organization?" Yes, of course. But only that God has given in the Bible. Man's tools of organization are like the hammers and chisels placed on the stones of the altar – They pollute it.

Yes, we do have need of Church government and direction, but again, God has provided enough in His word. If we follow the Bible in truth it is sufficient. If we aren't careful our government, rules and regulations will cause loyalty to the denomination over God, not consciously but subtly, in most cases without even realizing what is taking place.

In the days when I was a pastor, the small town in which I served had a pastor's group that met once each month. It was made up of all denominations from the community who wished to participate. It was a good thing. There were some congregations from different denominations who refused to come, but the handful that did meet, I believe, truly wanted to work to bring unity. There was an instance when we had an ecumenical Good Friday service. The congregations of the participating pastors met together in a single service. It was great. But before the service began, the participating pastors were waiting in a hallway to walk into the auditorium for

the service. The man who ran the local newspaper asked us a few questions, one of which was, "How does this all work? Aren't you guys' competitors?" It seems funny on the surface, but in a way he was right. We were coming together but also working separately to grow our own individual congregations. Had we not been from different denominations but simply individual congregations of the same Church (which in a way we were), we would not have been competitors but brothers and sisters standing together.

I lived for many years in a small community of around six-thousand people. However, in that small town there were more than twenty groups, each with different beliefs, each competing for those in the town who were church-going people. To me, that is sad. Again, had they been united and simply small groups of the same Church (and once again, in a way they were, but they insisted on different beliefs, some to the extent that they felt if the others didn't believe as they did then they weren't really Christians) that would have been a good thing. But they were not. They were competitors, not really living in the love of Christ as Jesus said.

This is not the way God intended for His Church to be.

Chapter 5

CLERGY AND LAITY

The upper room. Thirteen men gathered with intentions of eating the annual Passover meal. It was the time celebrating the passing of the angel of death from the Israeli people, then enslaved in Egypt. Each household was to kill a lamb, smear its blood over the doorposts of the house, then remain inside, eating the meal. The angel of death passed through Egypt and each house where the blood was not found suffered the loss of the firstborn son.

Jesus and His disciples prepared the celebration, but no one had taken the time to wash their dirty feet. In those days they wore sandals and walked nearly everywhere they went. At the end of the day their feet were filthy from the dirt and dust of the roads and streets. It was customary when entering a house for the owner to provide a servant and water to wash those dirty feet.

With just Jesus and His disciples there, no one had done that. After they had eaten, we are told in John 13 that Jesus, the leader of these men, rose up, removed His outer garment and wrapped a towel around Himself, then proceeded to kneel before each one of those men, disciples of His, those under Him, and washed their feet. When He had finished, we are told that He put His outer garment back on and said, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:12-17). He was essentially saying that as their Teacher, their Leader, the very Son of God, that He had taken the job of the lowest of servants washing their feet and serving them. So,

they should also do. They should always take the stance as a servant in order to be a leader. He further said in Matthew 23:11, "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant." And in Luke 22:25-26, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves."

The organized Church had become political, and the leaders began requiring higher honor. Those in leadership positions from priests all the way up to the Pope, began requiring those they were supposed to be serving to rather serve them. They demanded the people refer to them as Reverend, like they were so holy that they required reverence. The common people (you and me) were considered "laity" (laymen – non-professionals) and those in leadership positions became known as the "clergy." Unfortunately, this practice carried over with the Reformation into the many and various denominations.

I have served as a pastor and an ordained minister in a denomination. I have seen, in some circles, how this division has caused people to give great honor and special attention to those in ministering positions. I suppose there is a respect due to those being in obedience to God, but only if they are in full obedience to God. However, nowhere in the Bible has it ever been taught that those in leadership are above "regular Christians." In fact, the Bible teaches that we are all ministers.

You see, the very word "minister" means to serve. We are all servants. We have all been endowed with unique gifts and talents from God with which to serve in His kingdom. The Bible does tell us that He gave pastors, evangelists, apostles, prophets and teachers, all who are responsible for forthtelling of God's word. But the great Apostle Paul also taught in the Book of 1 Corinthians that all the gifts, whether spiritual or for service, are equally important. Not one is above another.

Is there need for leadership in the Church? Yes, of course. The problem occurs when we define leadership by our modern preconceptions. We tend to elate leaders. In the world leaders are called presidents, kings, and even dictators. These leaders demand and require honor and separation from those of us considered common. But in the Church

leadership is the opposite. We are called ministers – servants of God’s people.

We mentioned 1 Corinthians 12. Paul, writing to the Church at Corinth, was addressing problems and situations that had arisen in their congregations. Among the problems must have been showing and giving more honor to some because of their spiritual gifts. Paul listed several spiritual gifts explaining that none are more important than the others. They are all given by God, inspired by God and those being used are being used by God. One is not above another. Toward the end of the chapter, he also lists office gifts once again emphasizing that all are necessary but none are greater than the others.

Between these lists of gifts, he illustrates the uniqueness and equality of them by comparing the Church to a body (the body of Christ). Each member of our body, whether it be our heads, seen by people first and usually what we are judged by, or our parts that are private and covered, all are equally necessary. Together they make up our physical self. Each part is necessary and unique and has its own function, but collectively each unique function becomes the united function of the entire body.

This is such a wonderful example of the Church. Each of us has our own talents and giftings unique to who God made us. None of us serve exactly the same way. That’s because we are the body of Christ and collectively, we become the Church.

However, the division of clergy and laity forces division of the body. It makes those who may be teachers, preachers, evangelists, pastors, prophets or apostles to be lifted above those who pray for others, serve others, and perform the menial tasks that are so necessary to the body. I’ve often used the illustration of those in our sanitation departments. People tend to look down on those who pick up our trash, or keep our sewers running smoothly. Those may be dirty jobs but if they were not done how filthy and dirty our properties would be. How awful would our lives be if the trash wasn’t picked up or the sewers were allowed to backup. They are very necessary.

Just so is each and every member of the body of Christ. You, in your unique, special and wonderful giftings, are as much of a minister as was Billy Graham (not putting him down. I have great respect for how God used this man). Yet, he was merely a servant of the Gospel just as we are.

In the Church men have insisted on having a certain level of education and requiring a license or certificate of ordination before acknowledging their position. Because of man's nature I suppose to a degree this is necessary. But first and foremost, our ordination and calling comes from God. A certificate or license may legally allow one to serve but ultimately it is God who anoints with gifts of service in His kingdom.

When I was in the Army I knew several chaplains. Because of their training they had earned the right to their position. However, not all of them were called to do what they were doing. To illustrate, one chaplain in particular was very close to fulfilling his time of service and was planning on going back into civilian life. I spoke with him and asked if he was going to pastor a congregation once out. He replied, "Are you crazy? When I get out, I want nothing more to do with this. I'm doing something else." He was fulfilling a job. He wasn't called to do what he was doing. When we are called, even when we go into our retirement years, we can never go back on our calling. We may serve in a different direction but it is in our spirits (put there by God) and we are never satisfied until we are doing what we were made to do.

The division of clergy and laity formalizes, legalizes, and separates. I have known those who had the credentials and had fulfilled all the educational requirements who couldn't preach a message if they tried. On the other hand, I have known those who had no paper credentials but who were used mightily in the preaching of God's word. Yes, we should seek to be legal and have the proper credentials. But always know that paper doesn't define calling. Only God defines calling. We have to be careful not to allow a piece of paper to divide us into clergy and laity. Boldly I submit that the division of clergy and laity is yet another device of the devil to divide God's Church.

Chapter 6

DIVISION OF THE GODHEAD

Beams from the dazzling rays of sun sparkled like mini diamonds in the water. As he lowered the next individual into the river, then quickly pulled them back out, waves like silent celebrations moved over its surface. Another one baptized in repentance. In the crowds lining the shores of the Jordan River, a lone figure gently made His way through the crowd to the shore. As He began to wade out into the water, John, who had been doing the baptisms looked upon Him differently. Who was this individual? Something special radiated from Him. John spoke, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14). Jesus answered, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15). In his heart John knew and as humbled as he felt in that moment, he allowed Jesus to come to him in the water. He baptized Him then something extraordinary happened. He looked up and saw a spirit – a spirit that looked much like a dove, gently descending upon the Man he had just baptized. Suddenly a voice, deep and booming like thunder, spoke, "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17). In that single moment the great and magnificent, only God showed up in the fulness of the Godhead. God Himself spoke from Heaven, God the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove and God the Son, Jesus Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (see Colossians 2:9), showed up in undoubtable power and authority.

From the beginning God referred to Himself in plural terms. Genesis 1:26 says, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness ...'" Even His name in this passage "Elohim" is a plural suggesting that He is multiple. We know that there is only one God for He has said so Himself; Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" The original language literally says, "Listen O Israel: The Yāhweh

(LORD) Elohim (interpreted God but in plural form), the Yahweh is one." So, He is ONE GOD who exists in The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In reality the Godhead is really a simple thing. However, due to our finite interpretations, observations, and thinking, a God who is one but multiple is hard to wrap our minds around. That is when the mind of man rejects the truth that can only be grasped by faith, and interjects his own interpretations. Again, our limited experience of life cannot understand a three-fold being. It must be accepted and believed by faith.

When we accept it by faith, we can move on in our service and witness for the Almighty. That is what God wants us to do. It keeps our Christianity simple. However, sometimes man insists that he must understand. When he can't grasp it with his finite mind, then he has a tendency to make it fit what his mind can comprehend. Then we get into trouble. It causes yet another division in God's Church. As a reminder, all division is instigated by the devil in order to redirect the attention of the world away from the saving truth of the Gospel and to rather look at the differences that confuse, keeping people from accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The biggest differences in this dividing doctrine are that the Oneness say that Jesus is the main figure of the Godhead and that He sometimes manifests Himself as the Father, other times as the Son and yet others as the Holy Spirit. But that the One main entity who sits on the throne is Jesus. Those believing in the Trinity believe that God the Father sits on the throne, while Jesus Christ, the Son sits at His right hand (Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; Acts 5:31; Acts 7:55; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:23; Hebrews 12:2; and 1 Peter 3:22). The Holy Spirit is active in the lives of men on Earth (John 14:15-18).

Another difference is in the words spoken over a person when they are baptized. Trinitarians believe that the words spoken over an individual when they are baptized are "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." This is taken from Matthew 28:19. Later, in the books of Acts and in the letters of the Apostles we are told to be baptized "In the Name of Jesus." The most popular verse used is found in Acts 2:38. The emphasis of the words cause division. Many explanations can be given, arguments made and debates defended. However, words are just words. Let's understand that, yes, we should be baptized. Baptism is a public symbol and ceremony

letting all those who care to know that we have repented of sin, and given our lives over to God through Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:38 states, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" The common interpretation is that all three of these events need to happen in order to be saved. First to repent, then be baptized (and in the right formula), then receive the Holy Spirit. However, we must look at what the Bible says about the total subject. Paul said, "... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9). So, which is right? Do we have to repent and be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit to be saved, or are we saved simply by believing in the resurrection of Christ and confessing Him? It is clear here and elsewhere in the Bible that repentance and confession of Christ is what we must do to be saved. However, it is good that we make a public confession of our faith and the symbolism of baptism (being buried and raised again with Christ) is a clear picture of our confession. When we come to the Lord in sincerity and in full faith believing as the Bible directs, the Holy Spirit will take up residence in our lives.

As far as the words spoken over the one being baptized, they are merely a formality. The key is not in "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit," or "Jesus," but "in the Name of ...". Literally it is saying, be baptized by the authority of. The ultimate authority is God, our triune God. We are baptized by the authority of the complete Godhead. The words are not important but the act. The act is the witness, not the words.

Once again, the differences come into play when men want to put their own belief systems in front of what the Bible literally says. Why can't men seek the truth rather than fight over private interpretation? The Godhead is a marvelous thing. Our great and wonderful God has Himself come in Jesus Christ to redeem us, to save us, to rescue us from the curse of sin and death, and eternal death in the Lake of Fire. Rather than split hairs over words let's seek the truth and let the world see we are brothers and sisters by our love for each other and reach the world for Christ.

Chapter 7

ARMINIANISM AND CALVINISM

I left me both devastated and flabbergasted. For nearly a month my wife and I had been getting together on the weekends with her brother and his wife to play cards. It was fun and also good to have another couple, even though they were much older than we were, to pass time with. In the course of conversations, we would talk about our faith. We had mentioned backsliding a couple of times. Not in deep conversation; not in discussing doctrine or in defending any beliefs. My wife and I had both been brought up to believe that a believer could backslide, losing their “saved” status. We didn’t mean to offend her brother. I had no idea that he was a firm believer in the Calvinistic teachings on the subject. He had come to our home to correct us. We were in our twenties and, even though we knew the Bible, we weren’t prepared to defend our beliefs at a moment’s notice. He fired off one verse after another not allowing us time to look them up or defend ourselves. There was no discussion allowed as he rapidly spoke. I felt my blood beginning to boil. I wanted to ask him to leave, but because he was my wife’s brother, instead I got up and left the room. I had heard enough. Finally, we were told that we weren’t allowed to bring up the subject again in his house (what audacity! In his opinion it was okay to blast us in our house but we couldn’t defend our beliefs in his house).

We were young and inexperienced. Since then, I have studied much about the differing doctrines referred to as Arminianism and Calvinism. In a nutshell, Arminianism states that mankind has a free choice and can decide whether he will accept the Lord in salvation or not. It also states that we can choose to deny our faith and no longer be saved. There are several other differences which we will examine.

On the other hand, Calvinism states that because God is sovereign that He has created some people for eternal destruction and some to be

saved. Also, that we are powerless to resist God's salvation and once we have accepted Him regardless what we do we can never lose that salvation. Of course, there's much more but these are the main argumentative highlights.

Since those early days, just as with all other teachings devised by the devil to bring division to God's Church, there are truths to be found on both sides of the fence. Satan wants Christians to take extreme stands because, once again, it takes the attention from our true mission of winning souls to Christ and resorts to fighting over differences. The devil loves differences. He wants us at odds because it keeps God's Church divided. When we are arguing over foolish differences, we aren't showing our brother the love required to verify our Christian witness.

These two opposing teachings account for the greatest differences in doctrine in the Church that belongs to Jesus Christ. I can never emphasize enough how division in God's Church damages our witness to a lost world. As we fight and bicker over doctrines, teachings, dogmas and so forth, the politics of our Christian faith stand out and seem more important to those looking from the outside and it makes them to know that they have enough of that already. Why become a Christian if we are just going to fight and argue just as much as the unsaved do? It makes no sense and that is exactly what the devil wants to happen. **IT IS NOT WHAT GOD WANTS TO HAPPEN OR WHAT OUR SAVIOR DIED FOR.**

The two opposing sides are called Calvinism (so called because they resulted from the teachings of John Calvin) and Arminianism (named after a Dutch theologian named Jacobus Arminius). As you study the Bible there are truths to both of these teachings. Now I also want to explain that both of these men were great men of God. Both wanted to know more about our great and wonderful Creator. Both wanted to point to the saving faith of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Neither intended for what they taught to become opposing doctrines. And if you read their original works, they were not being political in God's Church. Their teachings were carried to extremes by their successors and followers.

Here are the five main points to which the teachings of each side emphasis:

1. Calvinism – Total Inability or Total Depravity. Arminianism – Free Will or Human Ability
2. Calvinism – Unconditional Election. Arminianism – Conditional Election
3. Calvinism – Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption. Arminianism – Universal Redemption or General Atonement.
4. Calvinism – Irresistible Grace or The Efficacious Call of the Spirit. Arminianism – the Holy Spirit Can be Effectually Resisted.
5. Calvinism - Perseverance of the Saints. Arminianism – Falling from Grace.

As with most, if not all, opposing teachings, there is some truth to both sides and there are total falsehoods that are taken to the extreme by both sides. In 1619 there was a meeting called the Synod of Dort. At this meeting Calvinism was reaffirmed and Arminianism was rejected as unscriptural. But just because a group of people make a statement or affirmation doesn't make it right. In this chapter, we intend to look at each of these teachings in light of what the scripture says on both sides and draw a conclusion. We are not doing this to prove or disapprove a teaching but to look at what the Bible actually says. After all, isn't that the final authority? Shouldn't that be our goal? Don't we want to come to a truthful conclusion? Isn't it for the benefit of the lost to come to Christ rather than prove whether what we believe is right or wrong?

I realize that this is a very strong statement, but if we really want to see people saved shouldn't we be willing to deny what we have been taught in order to come into absolute truth? It will make us look small to admit that we may have been wrong about what we have believed, but isn't it about what John the Baptist said, "He must increase and I must decrease?" (John 3:30). John, of course, was meaning that his own baptism and service had to take a backseat to the mission and purpose of Jesus. But in the same light, we must give up our will to conform to that of God. So in a way, we too must decrease and allow what God wants to do in and through our lives increase.

FREE WILL OR TOTAL DEPRAVITY?

He looked at me in desperation. “Pastor, please just pray that God will change her heart and send her back to me.” I felt great compassion for him. His wife had left him for another man. I couldn’t take sides. He was guilty of his own treatment of her; things that had seemingly driven her to make such a decision. At the same time, I felt his pain. He loved her and didn’t want to lose her. Couldn’t God change her heart? If God has all power and can do anything He wants to do, why couldn’t He just make her come back to her husband?

Of course, I believe that God can do whatever He wants to do. He is all-powerful. On the other hand, if He just worked people like puppets, making them do whatever He wanted them to do, then they wouldn’t be willing worshippers of Him. Without free-will we are merely flesh and blood robots following programmed decisions and responses. I had to lovingly explain that to this man. While I firmly believed that it was God’s will that she come back to him – her husband – still she had to come back to him by her own decision or there could never be love in their marriage. While God may desire for us to do one thing, He allows us to make our own choice. Only then have we completely loved Him Who loved us first.

I have often gone back to the Garden of Eden when teaching nearly everything from the Bible because, well, that’s where it all began. Regardless what we are talking about the foundations and “in the beginning” is the start of all explanations. Did God know even before He created the atmosphere and the Planet Earth what was going to happen? Of course He did. He is omniscient – All knowing, and is aware of what will happen and what decisions we will make even before it all takes place. He knew what the outcome would be even when our universe was a spark in His mind. He is omnipresent – Everywhere at the same time. He is there with us in our decisions from the foundations of eternity. He is omnipotent – All powerful. There is nothing He cannot do.

Back in Eden, Adam and Eve had a choice. Some might teach that they were created and doomed to eat the forbidden fruit. Yet by the very teaching of total depravity, if it be true, then they had no choice but to be obedient to the temptation of the devil. However, they could not be totally

depraved until they sinned. After their sin, yes indeed, they lost their spiritual contact with God. They made a choice and would have to live with it.

Later, their son Cain made a choice. He wasn't pre-ordained to kill his brother, for God gave him a clear path in order to be accepted. Instead, Cain made a choice, killed his brother, Abel and paid for it for the rest of his life. Didn't the all-knowing God foresee that this was going to happen? Of course He did. But if Cain hadn't had a choice to make, God wouldn't have wasted His time giving him options.

We could go back and forth, quoting scripture. Some verses seem to say that man has no choice in his decisions for God. That in His foreknowledge, He created them to make their bad choices and to reject Him. Other verses tell us that all have the same opportunity to be saved. Instead of arguing back and forth battling scripture with scripture let's see the unity of the word and what it teaches. For instance, in Acts 13:48 many versions interpret the word "tetagmenoi" as "ordained" or "appointed." While it can be interpreted this way it also means "to arrange in an orderly manner." In contrast, Matthew 11:28 says that to all who come to Him, He will give rest. The word in Greek is "pantes" meaning "all, any, every, the whole." So, which is right? Is it those pre-ordained only or is it all?

We could go on and on but again, arguing scripture is pointless. The most logical conclusion is that in God's foreknowledge and fore-presence, He extends salvation to everyone. He knows that all will not accept. He has foreseen those who will reject Him and in my personal opinion it grieves Him. Still, He gives all the same equal choice and by our own decision we choose salvation or reject it. Because He fore-knows, then those who will reject and will accept are set in order. We are ordained and predestined because of God's fore-knowledge.

When Adam and Eve sinned, for certain we became totally depraved. We lost fellowship with God and because of it our spirits died. But just as the Israeli people in Numbers 21 looked to the serpent Moses made and set on a pole in order to be healed of the bites of the fiery serpents sent into the camp, so we can choose to look to Christ in order to be saved. Those people had a choice. They could gaze upon Moses' creation and be healed, or they could doubt and turn away and die. Now I know that doesn't seem like a wise decision to make, but neither does choosing hell over heaven. But it is a choice of our own will.

The extremists in Arminianism say that it is all by man's choice. That is not true. Our salvation doesn't depend on us. Only our acceptance. When we realize and accept then we are saved. God has made the provision. It was God who became man and died on the cross for our salvation. It was God who arose from the grave gaining victory over sin and death. Only God offers the free gift of salvation.

But as with any gift we must reach out and take it. We must receive it. That is the extent of free-will. We accept His gift. Everything else is only by His grace and His provision.

The extremists in Calvinism say that we have no free-will but that God has created some for destruction and others for salvation and those created for salvation have no choice but to come to God. If this is the case then there is no reason for evangelism. If God has preordained those to be saved then they will be saved regardless what we do or how we might influence others.

These are the extremes. But the truth of God, when there are scriptures that seem to conflict, will always lie in the interpretations of both. God's word means one thing. There aren't verses to support those who choose to be Arminian and scriptures just for those who choose to be Calvinistic. They exist for us to find the truth. The truth is that we do have to make a choice to receive the free gift God has given us. He knows who will do that and who won't. In that we are set in order because He knows our choice before we make it.

When we marry the scriptures together instead of fighting each other with them, then we can win souls to Christ. Then we can show them that they have a choice to make and it is the most important choice they will ever make.

Yes, we are totally depraved because of sin. But we have the free-will to choose Christ when we hear the gospel and are drawn to the truth because of what we have heard and now learned.

CONDITIONAL ELECTION OR UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION?

I will never forget the night I completely turned my life over to God. It was glorious. After the service, when we were back home, because it was so cold, Dad let my sister sleep with Mom and he slept in our room with the boys. There was so much joy in my heart that I couldn't get the worship songs out of my head. I sang them with my breathing, if that is even possible. I thought that no one would notice. But Dad did. He said something like, "Jerry, you need to calm down now, son, and try and get some sleep."

I was happy. But there were other times before this that I felt the need to turn my life over to God but resisted. I made a choice that night. I chose to yield to God and give myself over to Him. Did He draw me? Yes, of course He did. Did He know that I was going to come to Him? Of course, in His great and awesome omniscience, He saw me coming to Him before I ever made the choice. Could I have resisted His call? Did I really have a choice in the matter? Some feel that the answer to that question is "no." I know in my heart that I did have a choice. Even after our salvation we continue to have a choice. Some teach that once we have accepted Christ that regardless what we do, or even if we decide we no longer want to believe in Him that we are still saved. Others argue that if we are tempted to do that then, perhaps we didn't receive Christ to begin with. That is entirely possible. But if, in the rare occasion, one purposely chooses to forsake Christ, they can do so. I can't imagine why anyone would want to do that, and I believe that if they are genuinely saved, most will not, but still it is possible.

The two camps of Calvinism and Arminianism further divides God's Church by fighting over this point. Calvinism says that we have no choice in the matter. That God, before ever creating the sky above and the Earth beneath, decided that He was going to create some people for salvation and some for destruction. Those whom were created for salvation have no choice in the matter. Sooner or later, they will yield to God's call. They can't help it. They can't resist. He has called them and they will come.

The other side says that man has complete free choice in the matter and that God calls all giving them the ability to choose. Because God is omniscient, He knows before-hand who will make the choice to serve Him and who will reject His call that is extended to all of humanity.

Thus, conditional election says that man has a choice to make. Because of free-will that he is instrumental in his own salvation. Unconditional election says that man cannot resist God. Salvation is not determined by any choice made or any condition. Man has nothing to do with it. We will just automatically, at some time in our lives, be saved because that is what God has determined.

Once again, we could quote scripture after scripture, some supporting one opinion while others support the other opinion. There is no good purpose for doing that. People will believe what they want to believe. As with every other consideration in each of the chapters of this book, the differing opinions only serve to further divide God's Church. And, again, our disunity tells the world a different message from that which Jesus Christ wants to give. It shows that, while we may say that we love our brother, we really don't.

Yes, God does know far in advance, prior to our birth, if we are going to be saved or not. I also firmly believe that those who will reject Him, causes Him to grieve because He really does create each of us from His great desire for our fellowship.

So, does God make people purposely as "vessels" to be destroyed? It would seem so, from the reading in Romans 9. Always remember that God is God – He is all-powerful and He can do whatever He wants to do. But why would He do this? Is He so unfeeling that He would make some people just to destroy them in eternity in Hell? The full context of this passage is speaking of the Jews. Paul is saying that God knew that many of them would not come to Him, but that He would always have a remnant. It also states that God created Pharaoh in the days of Moses just for the purpose of resisting the deliverance of Israel so that He could demonstrate His freeing power to His people.

Here's the thing – It is very hard to believe that our all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere-present-at-the-same-time, all-loving God would do such a thing. Is He really that cruel? Who would want to serve a God like that? Man, in his limited thinking, limited knowledge, limited power, and limited anticipation of the future, cannot bring human reason to God. He is so vast in His knowledge and in the plan of His creation that we will never understand it, at least not in our present form and life. We want to make God either black or white while in our own existence we live in multiple and

complex shades. But the shades of God are even more complex and intricate than our human ability could ever fathom.

Therefore, if we insist on rigidly believing that God has preordained it all, and that He already knows who will be saved because He created them to be saved, then there is no reason to spread the Gospel. If they are ordained to be saved, then they will be saved without any assistance from us. Therefore, why do what Jesus told us to do? Why should we waste our time going into all the world to preach the gospel? (see Matthew 28:18-20). If they are vessels created for salvation then they will be saved without intervention.

But Jesus did tell us to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Jesus is the one Paul calls Lord. Now, don't get me wrong; I believe Paul was a great man and given many revelations by Jesus Christ. But he too talks about taking the gospel everywhere. In fact, that is what he dedicated his life to do.

Perhaps, just perhaps, God does create some for destruction, to carry out His will. I am not the final authority on this subject. Only God is. He knows. But we don't. I have no idea if someone was created for destruction. In fact, I may form an opinion of someone and believe that they are doomed to be lost, and over the course of time someone gives them the gospel at just the right time with just the right words and they may become a great evangelist themselves.

By and large we have a choice. That is why Jesus told us to go. To give people their choice. So, in fact, both sides have truth to them and both sides have falsehoods to them. Just like everything else taught in the Bible, people want to go to extremes when the truth consists of a bit of both sides. We can't believe just the scriptures that seem to teach unconditional election, or just believe those that teach conditional election. Both are taught in scripture. So, we must find the middle ground of both teachings to find the truth of God's word.

We all have a choice. It isn't that our choice is the determining factor of our salvation. We don't save ourselves. Only the price paid in the sacrifice of Christ can do that. But we are required to accept that sacrifice and allow Him to apply it to our lives.

Going back to Romans 9, yes, God did raise Pharaoh up to resist His deliverance of the people of Israel. But that does not mean that he had no chance of becoming better. After God had finally convinced Pharaoh to let His people go, Pharaoh could have left it there. He could have repented and changed his mind about God. But in his pride, he pursued the Israeli people and God had to completely destroy him at the Red Sea.

Judas too, was raised up to betray Jesus. However, after the betrayal Judas had a choice to make. He was sorry for what he had done. He even went to the high priest intending to return the money for Jesus' freedom. When the high priest refused, in his sorrow he went out and hung himself. But he could have repented and I can't help but believe that had he done that Jesus would have forgiven him.

Do you see it? Yes, God knows all. Of course, He can do whatever He wills when it comes to mankind. But God always gives men a chance, and a choice. Even those He told Israel to completely wipe out and destroy when they came to the Land of Promise, were given the space of over 400 years to repent and they refused.

Why would He do that? He does it because of His great love for mankind. He will always give space to repent. But just because we have a choice does not take away from the sovereignty of God. Only He is God. Only He can save. He only wants man to respond with "yes" when He speaks to their hearts. Everyone will not be saved. But everyone has the same opportunity to be saved.

UNIVERSAL REDEMPTION OR PARTICULAR REDEMPTION?

How could life get any better? I had accepted Jesus Christ. I asked Him to be Lord of my life. I honestly can't remember ever having greater joy in my heart. At that time, I knew nothing about theology or doctrine; I only knew that God had changed my life from the inside out. Was I perfect? Not at all. I only had the perfect Holy Spirit in me regenerating my once dead spirit back to life.

There was nothing I could do to be saved. Jesus Christ did all the work and gave us the free gift of salvation. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of

sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." And Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Looking at the original language the word used for "gift" in Romans literally means, "grace-effects." However, in Ephesians 2 the word means "approach-presents."

It seems simple enough. In previous chapters we have discussed how this free gift works. As with any gift, in order to receive it you must reach out and accept it. Of course that makes sense. The difficulty comes in the two opposing arguments. One says that Jesus Christ paid the price for sin and defeated death, grave, and hell by rising again. He now extends that victory to each of us by offering us the free gift of His grace. But in order to be "saved" we must accept the gift. The argument is that this puts control of salvation in the hands of man because he must do something in order to be accepted by God.

On the other side of the coin, the teaching is that Christ did it all. Because of predestination, some have been chosen by God to be covered by the free gift offered by Christ's grace while others have no choice but to be lost and left out.

The opposing doctrines are called respectively, "Universal Redemption" or "General Atonement" and "Limited Atonement" or "Particular Redemption." Once again, the Church that belongs to Jesus Christ is divided by arguing over this doctrine. To define these opposing teachings, Universal Redemption says that the work Jesus did makes it possible for all to be saved but doesn't actually save anyone until they believe on Him. Further, that His death paid the required price for God to pardon sinners but only when they believe on Christ. Man must choose to accept it.

The teaching of Particular Redemption says that the work Christ did on Calvary and in the resurrection automatically paid for the sin of those predestined to go to Heaven and be a part of God's people. They have no choice in the matter. They will be saved.

If this is the case why do those promoting this teaching still seek for people to come to Christ? If they can't resist, why do they ask them to come

to Jesus and accept Him? Seems to me that it is still requiring man to accept the free gift.

Again, division occurs and rather than seeking to save the lost we spend time splitting hairs over teaching. Once again, a work of the devil to separate God's people and take the attention away from the matter at hand – to lead others to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself said, "...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10). Aren't we all lost until we come to God? Of course, as we have already addressed, in His omniscience, God indeed knows who will ultimately come to Him and who won't. But we don't know that. This being the case, we should strive to see as many as possible come to God rather than bickering over who is chosen and who isn't. We assume that all are chosen and can freely come to God because of the work of Christ, then leave it in God's able hands.

RESISTANCE GRACE OR IRRISTABLE GRACE?

One of my favorites parables of Jesus is that of the sower and the seed. **Matthew 13:3-9** reads, "Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: 'Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!'"

After telling this story, later, His disciples came to Him asking Him to clarify it. What was its meaning? Jesus explained it to them, letting them know that the seed was the Gospel. Those called to share the Gospel (which is really all of us) relate it to all in our hearing. But not all receive it. He said, "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But

he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.'" (Matthew 13:18-23). Pretty straightforward and simple, don't you think?

Where the difficulty comes in is that the Armenian school of thought believes all have the same equal opportunity to let the word fall on the good ground of their hearts, while the Calvinists believe that only those pre-ordained and pre-chosen will have that good ground.

I suppose my question is "why scatter the seed at all if God has already chosen who will have the good ground?" If that is the case, why not just go to the good ground to begin with?

The Armenian teaching is that the word is preached to all, and all are given the same opportunity to come to Christ. We know all will not, but we don't know who those who will respond are. Because, as we have already established, God knows all things even before they happen, He already knows who will respond to the Gospel and who won't. But that doesn't mean that each person has the same opportunity.

On the other hand, the Calvinists, while agreeing that the word be preached to all, say that those who have been pre-ordained to come to Christ have no choice in the matter. When they hear they cannot resist the Gospel call but are compelled to choose Christ because they were created to do so. Those who don't respond have no idea what it all means and have no choice but to reject the Gospel because they were created to reject it.

Their argument goes a little deeper by saying that because the Armenian teaching that all have the same opportunity and can resist the leading of the Holy Spirit and reject the Gospel, is saying in effect that God is limited to man's free-will choice.

I'll give you my personal "Jerry Ousley 101" opinion. What does it really matter? Again, as we have already established, if man is helpless to resist if he is one of the chosen, then why even go to all the trouble of scattering the seed? Why not just ask God to reveal to you who is chosen and go directly to them? Wouldn't that save a lot of lives? Because if we tell the wrong person in this world, they are going to become angry and possibly retaliate. In some countries telling the Gospel is against the law and is punishable by death.

Let's look at it this way. Once again, we have established that God knows all things well in advance of when they take place. Instead of wondering if we can resist God or not, let's just spread the word and rejoice when others come to Christ. In this way we bring no division to the Body of Christ. The other two doctrinal teachings divide God's Church.

FALLING FROM GRACE OR PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS?

The final teaching of these two schools of thought is whether or not one can lose his salvation. While some Armenians believe in the eternal security of the believer, all in the Calvinistic camp say that once a person has come to Christ, regardless of what they do in their lives, they will never lose their salvation.

We need to be careful with this subject, because YES, God does a complete work. What He did for mankind in Christ is once for all. Jesus became the final and perfect sacrifice for sin. There is no other way to come into the Kingdom of God. And YES, as long as the believer believes, and repents when he fails (and we all fail and we all need to repent when we fail), God is gracious to forgive because of Jesus Christ our advocate. John wrote, *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus christ the righteous."* (1 John 2:1). That is the key to maintaining our salvation.

I remember as a teenager, I wasn't perfect after I came to Christ – Not by a long shot! I tried. I wanted to perfectly obey God and not sin against Him, but the fact was, that I did (and still do). I get angry and react in ways

I shouldn't. I sometimes get road-rage yelling at other drivers as I travel. But afterwards, God prods my heart and I have to repent.

However, I know of those who have made commitments to Christ. For one reason or another, they gave up on that decision and turned away. Yes, it is possible that just as in the parable of the sower, the seed fell on the wrong type of ground. The key is, however, that it did fall on the ground. Some believed. Some made commitments. I have known of some of those commitments and I believe they were genuine. But they felt they couldn't live the life. For some that was because they were taught that once they were saved, they should never sin again. While that is the perfect scenario, and what we desire in our new life for God, it isn't reality. Those who teach that are barking up the wrong tree.

I do, however, believe that to truly give up on our salvation requires a pre-determined decision. Just committing a sin doesn't take away our salvation as quoted in 1 John 2:1. But if we know this, and have lived in this and still make a conscience decision to turn away from God, we can fall out of grace. It doesn't happen over-night and it requires one to know what they are doing. It isn't an accident. I have known of preachers who have powerfully presented the word of God and witnessed many come into the kingdom, then they turned away for one reason or another. Did this mean that they didn't have the goods to start with? In some cases, yes this is possible. But not in all.

Paul also wrote in Romans 11:11-25, "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.* You will

say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." **This entire passage describes how that many of the Jews were cut off because of their unbelief, and we, as believers, were grafted in the tree (the Kingdom of God – the Church) in their place. But we are not to be haughty and brag about our position because, as Paul taught, we can be cut off and the Jews put back in our place. Some have explained this by highlighting that Paul said "He MAY NOT spare you ..." But read on, later he also wrote, "Otherwise YOU ALSO WILL BE CUT OFF."**

Here's the way I teach it: We are eternally secure as long as we remain eternally secure. In other words, as long as we desire to remain secure in Christ we are. Even when we fail, we repent and remain secure. But when we choose to disbelieve, to give up on Christ and to reject His provided security, we can. He won't make us go to Heaven. We can foolishly reject His provision and choose Hell. I, for the life of me, will never understand how or why someone who has tasted the grace of God would choose to do this, but it occasionally happens.

Chapter 8
MODERN-DAY WORSHIP

*M*y wife and I found some empty seats and sat down. A good crowd had assembled and we were impressed by how many had come together to worship God and hear a message from the Bible. There were greeters at the door who welcomed us into the service, and a few others also welcomed us after we had taken our seats. But it was only a small token of the large crowd that had assembled.

As the scheduled service time arrived, the lights were dimmed over the congregation and the lights on the platform were turned up. The worship team took the stage reminding me of rock stars at a concert. The music began, and those leading the songs were very good, with talent near professional quality. The lights changed color and nearly danced in rhythm with the music as a subtle smoke oozed around the feet of those singing. Was this supposed to be worship? The talent was good. The quality of the music was good, and the words to the songs certainly could promote worship. But somehow, it seemed more like entertainment.

Those in the congregation raised their hands and jumped up and down, dancing to the music, but somehow it just wasn't what my mind thought of when I thought of worship. Something was missing. Something was lacking. Could it be that they had all the quality, all the glamor but none of the anointing expected when seeking to enter the presence of God?

After a few songs an offering was received and we anticipated a pastor taking the pulpit. Instead, a screen was lowered and, because it was a satellite congregation, a pastor located in another city and with another congregation began to preach. His message was one of good advice. There was an abundance of comedy in his words, and encouraging thoughts to enhance one's life, but only a few moments dedicated to give an opportunity

for lost souls to seek God. My wife commented that we could get the same thing watching a service on TV, and she was right.

Worship is so very important to our Christian experience. However, in today's church-world when we use the word "worship" most people think of singing. So, what is true worship? The broader definition of worship includes showing awe, reverence, respect and sometimes even fear for a deity. The worshipper honors the said deity.

In the Bible, without fail, worship included bowing one's body low to the ground or floor so demonstrating that the object of worship is above the worshipper. I can tell you from my own personal experience, when I have felt the presence of God I am made to feel "small" in His presence. I become aware of the total immenseness of God and the complete insignificance of myself.

While worship is extremely important to our salvation journey, we have attempted to broaden the scope of it to include things such as giving, serving, cleaning the building in which we gather, as well as a host of other things. Basically, in today's congregations, anything we do for the congregation becomes worship. While these things may be important, and they must be done, and anything we do sincerely for our Lord can be positively viewed as acts of service, they really do not fulfill the definition of worship. True worship of God takes place when the presence of God touches our lives driving us to give honor and, once again, see Him in His glory and greatness in comparison of our own frailty and smallness. It happens when our heart has touched the heart of God. We become aware of His presence and can feel in our spirits His nearness, and we worship Him (which, by the way, He is always near us because God is omni-present, meaning that He is always everywhere. We just get our busy lives focused on other things and are not aware of His closeness to us). True worship will also always drive us to be humbled, in one way or another, in God's mighty presence. We may feel emotional (not wildly and out of control) because, as emotional creations, when we sincerely and genuinely find ourselves in His presence, it becomes impossible to not feel something emotional. Honestly it makes me to wonder if some of these services are promoted as worship in order to make sure the money is coming in and that the services are completed.

Music is not worship but it can set the stage of our hearts to enter into God's presence and lead us to true worship. But as wonderful as it feels to

sing a hymn, or worship song of praise to our God, it is merely a tool to aid us to an attitude of worship. Other methods of service can lead us into worship as well, but, once again, are only tools to make us aware of God but they are not acts of worship. Again, they are acts of service.

This being said, I want to concentrate this chapter on the aspects of worship that have resulted in division of God's Church.

MUSIC

We look at music first because most of all this is what the majority of Christians think of when worship is mentioned. As already established, the right music can open our hearts into an attitude of worship but, contrary to popular opinion, it is not worship itself.

The group of singers and musicians are often referred to as "the worship team." They are considered to be those individuals who are responsible to lead the congregation into worship.

In days gone by, we sang from hymnals normally led by a single individual known as the song leader. He or she was accompanied by a handful of musicians which included a pianist or organist or both, sometimes a guitarist and in larger congregations possibly some other instruments. Most congregations knew that they were going to sing three hymns and often only two to three verses of each song. At the end of the sermon there was normally an invitational hymn. In some less rigid congregations, there may be a few special numbers sang or led by other individuals.

During the seventies, contemporary Christian music began to emerge. There was much controversy regarding this new type of music. Because it was patterned after secular rock, the larger part of congregations condemned and criticized the music. However, it was here to stay as the Jesus Movement came into being and embraced the contemporary style of music.

As the years passed in order to attract the younger generation into the organized church, including some contemporary Christian music became critical to growth. Some congregations bluntly refused and most of those

dwindled down to a handful of attendees. Others tried to organize two services, one for contemporary music and one for more traditional hymns.

In today's organized congregations most are now led by the worship teams mentioned above. To their credit many genuinely do seek God in their song choices and truly lead people into an attitude of worship. However, some are looking for popularity and have included light shows, stage smoke and other props that cause the so-called worship time to greatly resemble popular music concerts. This is blatantly not worship. If people aren't led into an attitude that welcomes God's presence and consequently opens up into true worship you have only been entertained by the show.

Congregations have split over music. They have battled each other and actually brought conflict in their congregations rather than unity. As with all divisions this does not provide a witness to the world of our love but actually gives the impression that the Church is no different than what the world has to offer.

When it comes to music God has never specified, ordained, nor promoted a particular style. God promotes music that leads into true, heartfelt worship. What leads one believer into an attitude of worship may sound repulsive to another. For that reason, I have always said that congregations have distinct personalities just like people do. We should associate our personalities to congregations more similar to us. In this way we put an end to conflict and bring glory to God.

God is not pleased with trying to be what we are not. Congregations that present a show rather than promote worship bring no glory to God. It is important to align ourselves with those congregations that do focus on glorifying Gospel rather than men.

APPAREL AND APPEARANCE

What does what we wear or what we look like have to do with worship? This is a very good question. Other than looking and dressing modestly (see 1 Timothy 2:9 and James 2:1-2), the Bible is silent in the New Testament regarding these subjects. The Old Testament has a lot to say about apparel and appearance, but we must remember that the Old Testament

concentrated on the Jewish people and the Law of Moses was instituted by God as an example showing us that, like the Jewish people, it could not be perfectly fulfilled and proves that we need a Savior in Jesus Christ. That being said, when it comes to physical appearance, apparel and diet, we are freed in the work of Christ and our position and relationship with God is not dependent on the works we do or fail to do.

In spite of this, there are many congregations who insist on judging another's Christian experience based on what they wear or look like. For instance, the Old Testament plainly tells the Jewish people that they should not be adorned with expensive piercings or have their bodies tattooed. But in Christ we are under grace and these things no longer apply. It isn't in the length or color of our hair, nor in one's choice of clothing, just like it is no longer a requirement to adhere to dietary requirements. These things do not affect our worship. God looks at our hearts as they are bowed before His presence. He is not focused on what we look like.

LOCATION

There is really only one verse of scripture that could remotely apply to group attendance. It is found in Hebrews 10:25 and it says: "... not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." This verse is often used to promote church attendance and some insist that not attending church services regularly actually becomes a sin.

The full context of this verse begins with verse 19 and is teaching that because of what Jesus did for us at Calvary and then by raising from the dead, we have the right to enter into the Holy of Holies which was the innermost part of the Temple, also referred to in this passage as "The House of God." Jesus is the High Priest. We are told to come near, approaching the Holy Place where the presence of God dwells. We hold tightly to what we have been given in Christ.

Then it tells us to consider each other (this is talking about Christian brothers and sisters) stirring up love and good works, not forsaking or rejecting and neglecting to assemble together. Yes, coming together is very important. Being with other Christian believers gives us strength. But

nowhere does it say that this assembly must be in a building we have labeled “the church.” Yes, of course, being in fellowship with other believers is essential, strengthening, encouraging and wholesome. But that can take place when we meet in each other’s homes, at a restaurant sharing dinner, a casual meeting on the street or anywhere else we come together with other Christians. As the Bible says about two or three believers coming together (see Matthew 18:19-20) He is there with them. This applies to agreeing together on a spiritual matter or just coming together. Some say it only applies to praying over a matter and agreeing together in prayer, and that certainly does apply, but anytime Christians come together, whether planned or a casual meeting, the Spirit of Christ is there too.

This all being said, if or when we are told that worship must take place in a building we have come to call “the church” just know that it isn’t true. Worship comes from our hearts. It happens, as we have previously established, when we are aware of God’s presence and we bow before Him. It can happen anywhere we come into contact with other believers, or when we are all alone with God.

EMOTION

Everyone feels things. In fact, God made us that way. It is completely natural to be happy when things are going our way, or to be sad when we have lost a loved one. We get angry when people irritate us, or joyous when we have a good day. Emotion is not wrong. I will also say, as I have many times, that, as emotional creations, I believe it is impossible for the Spirit of God to touch our lives without us experiencing some kind of emotion. In the Old Testament, when God showed up, whether it was a visit from an angel, or what we call a theophany (appearance of God in human form), more often than not they were afraid to the point that they were terrified. Nearly every time an angel appeared, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament, his first words were “Don’t be afraid.”

However, in some circles, worship of God is measured by how emotional an individual becomes. This is farthest from the truth. As we have already written, without fail, when we worship God and we become aware of His Spirit around us, we will feel some kind of emotion. Some may display their emotion more than others because we are all wonderfully, individually

unique. But the degree of how we display that emotion in no way means that one has worshipped more than another.

Some call it a “blessing.” In these same circles one who has had an extraordinary worship time with God, is not considered “blessed” unless they had a very intense emotional reaction. The circles have gone so far as to say that one has not even received a salvation experience without an extreme emotional reaction.

On the other side of the coin, there are those who claim that any emotional display is out of order. Again, I challenge you to be exposed to God’s Holy Spirit without even a twinge of emotion. It may all be inside, or we may weep, laugh, or shout out. We may even feel happy, like David did, and dance before the Lord. The point is that we cannot help but feel something when in God’s presence. I believe the key is to remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:32-33, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author of confusion* but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” This means that we are to exercise self-control when experiencing emotions in our worship of God. Notice in verse 33 that the words “the author” are in italics which means that these words are not in the original text but were added to bring clarity to the verse. This being the case, verse 33 is literally saying, “For God is not confusion but of peace ...” We are to exercise control in the emotion we feel when we experience the presence of God in our worship. It is not wrong to feel emotional and we can’t always hide our emotions, nor should we. But we are to experience them in a way that doesn’t take the main focus away from God and on us.

COMMUNITY (Numbers)

Some believe that we can only worship God in church, referring to the congregational gathering of believers. We addressed the subject of the Church already, but just as a reminder, what we call a church in today’s vernacular, refers to a building where Christians gather. But that is only a building. The true Church resides in the hearts of believers in Jesus Christ. These same groups sometimes teach that you can only worship in the designated building. This, again, divides God’s true Church because we can

worship God anywhere. That isn't an excuse to not assemble together. We must remember that the Bible never specifies how often we should come together. It never tells us where we must come together, only that we shouldn't neglect coming together (see Hebrews 10:25).

Worship does not depend on how many believers are gathered in one place. Worship takes place in our spirits and happens when our spirits make spiritual connection with God's Spirit. It can happen anywhere, any place and any time that we lay our hearts prostrate before God. That is worship. All else are results of worship. It doesn't depend on where we are or who we are with, except for being in God's presence and with Him and His Holy Spirit. That is the only community we need to worship God.

It can happen in a large crowd, in a group meeting, in a designated building of Christian gathering (we call a church), but it is not required.

VERBIAGE

I only address verbiage because some believe it has to do with the words we speak. Worship has nothing to do with what we have to say but, again, where our heart is. There are no magic words that make us worship. Oh, worship can occur because someone has spoken words that lead us to reach out for the heart of God, but the words in themselves do not constitute worship. Never let anyone lead you to believe that they have the proper formula to cause people to worship God. It doesn't happen because a minister preaches or teaches or says the proper phrases. This can of course lead to worship, but it isn't in itself, worship.

PHYSICAL POSITION

Finally, we address the misleading that worship can only take place when we assume a physical stance or position. It doesn't take place because we are kneeling, standing, or have our hands raised in the air. As with the other topics, it can be a result of our worship. We may fall down before the Almighty God. We might stand looking to the heavens because of the presence of His Spirit. Or we might lift our hands as an expression of

surrendering, or reaching for the God of Heaven. But none of these necessarily mean that we are worshipping God.

I have been in services where the music was loud, and even though the songs are meant to lead people into worship what really takes place in many assembled there is nothing more than raw emotion, excitement or the desire to make others think they are worshipping.

In the Bible, many fell down prostrate before God when they worshipped. This was a result of their emotion caused by the presence of God. It is not wrong and can be a very legitimate response to His Spirit, but it is not a requirement.

In summary of this chapter, let's take a look at Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. In John 4:19-26 we see that when the woman saw that Jesus knew much about spiritual matters, she changed the subject to that of where was the proper place to worship. She told Him that the Samaritan ancestors taught that they must worship in the mountain they were currently on. Jesus answered by beginning with the fact that, in the Old Testament, the Jews were required to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. But He added in verse 23-24, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." By this He told her that worship didn't depend on physical position or location but in the spiritual stance. He said that we were to worship in spirit (from our hearts, our spiritual existence) and in truth (honest sincerity).

The church world of today has caused yet another division in their teaching about worship. The Bible is always the truth and our twisted interpretations only serve to drive us apart.

Chapter 9

REUNITING GOD'S CHURCH

*H*OW can we do it? How can we undo all the division that has happened since the birth of the Church? How can we reunite God's Church? As we have seen throughout this book, since the Church came into existence, the devil has had one mission: To bring division to this greatest of institutions. Why would he do this? Why was it so important to attempt to bring death to such a thing as the Church? Hadn't Jesus already died to pay for sin? Hadn't He already risen from the grave to bring life to the dead? It had already been done. Why now?

We have organized our divisions to the point that we must ask ourselves, "Is there any way to return? Is it possible to restore what has been lost?" As we have progressed through this book, we have seen it pushed apart when the Church was given power by the Roman government. It became the most powerful political force in the latter days of the empire which resulted in division because the leaders began to make their own rules aside from the Bible.

It was split when the Reformation began, splitting Protestants and Catholics. As the reformed groups began to organize, we see that even the Protestant movement became fragmented by belief and denominations were formed which brought division in the division. Then, in both the Catholic and protestant divisions people were divided as clergy and laity.

Other divisions formed because men could not agree on interpretation of the scripture. Different beliefs were started about the Godhead, whether it was only God or a trinity? Beliefs were formed as to whether certain people were going to be saved or if it was extended to everyone. Did God set up a plan from the foundations of the Earth that determined that only those chosen

by God would be saved and everyone else was automatically determined to perish in Hell?

And finally, in our modern-day worship we further split our congregations because of how we worship, what our music is like, how we dress, how we wear our hair, or dress. As a result, is it really worship at all?

Can we be restored or is it everlastingly too late?

In answer, of course it can be restored. Yes, we can reunite. In fact, we must. Our unity is the witness to the world. We have mentioned this over and over in this book. But the words of Jesus echo the truth and the answer. We quote once again the words of Jesus to His disciples as He was about to pay the awful price for our salvation. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35) "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) "These things I command you, that you love one another." (John 15:17). How can we love one another, and prove our love for each other, as we argue and spend our time attempting to prove our brother wrong instead of witnessing of Christ's love through our love for each other?

Until Jesus returns, we probably aren't going to dissolve all of our denominations. Who is right and who is wrong? I doubt very much that we are going to close all of our elaborately decorated buildings and gathering places we have come to call our church. I don't think that we are going to erect mega-structures in each town and city that can house all the believers in a single community. In our modern day and age, these things just don't seem to be a practical solution.

But there are things we can do that will at least let the world know that we are trying to be united. If we do these things across the boundaries of our walled in beliefs and organized divisions, if we can begin to truly love each other, working together despite what our congregation may teach, then maybe, just maybe we can restore our witness to the world. It is, after all, perishing in its sin as we argue, fuss and build our elaborate walls of division. If we can bridge the gap between us, maybe we can get the world to take us seriously once again.

In order to reunite God's Church, we must stop thinking we are right and everyone else is wrong. Our denomination doesn't have a corner on the Gospel. None of us are completely right. We have been influenced by our teachers, what our group says is the truth. I submit that there is truth to all denominations just as there is false teaching in all denominations. Each book of the Bible was written with a single message. In our attempt to make ourselves right we have stretched its meaning in order to support our opinion. We have all done it. We are all guilty. We must begin studying God's word with the ideology that it does only mean one thing. God did not intend for all the doctrines and teachings that conflict, to be a part of His Church. The Bible means what it says. It is our duty – no matter how studious you are, what you think you have learned, and what you believe that you know – it is our duty to strive to know for sure what it is saying, what it is meaning, and what it teaches. It will take us until the Lord returns and sets up His kingdom. I don't think, because of our humanity, that we will ever all agree while inhabiting this planet. At least not until Jesus Christ sets up His eternal kingdom. But what will be accomplished is that the world will see us loving each other, and trying to agree, while peacefully disagreeing and our witness can be restored.

We can seek to end entertainment and look for real, true, heartfelt worship. When Jesus confronted the woman at the well in John 4, when she realized that He was a prophetic authority, she immediately did what we all sometimes do; that is to bring up our differences. She, being a Samaritan, believed that true worship could only take place on the mountain of Samaria, while the Jews believed that true worship could only take place at the temple in Jerusalem. In John 4:23 Jesus plainly told her, *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."* Simple, heartfelt worship. It isn't worship inspired by professional singers (though that can be worship), or lights and smoke in attempt to set the stage and impress. It doesn't come through giving, working, or making a beautiful edifice of a building to show that world how much we worship. It is neither in an elaborate building, a humble shack, or on a mountain. It is reality from the heart that realizes how great and magnificent God is and then bowing ourselves in submission to Him, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. It is truth coming from our hearts in a spiritual union with the Spirit of God. When we can come to

that then, collectively we can worship God and it will be a witness to the world of our unity.

As we become aware of our differences, of the ways we constantly divide ourselves, and then spend time in prayer, honest, sincere, heart-felt prayer, about those things, we will find that as we grow still, and listen to God, we will hear in our hearts His voice, leading us to unity. We can be united, even across boundaries, if we begin to love instead of constantly trying to prove that we are right. When we submit to God, allow Him to be our guide in the Bible, our real and honest Deity of worship and spend time in conversation with Him, He will show us the way, maybe only one step at a time. Perhaps just enough light down our dark paths to illuminate the next few feet, but enough to bring us together as we should be.

CONCLUSION

We can do it. Coming together is not an impossibility. It isn't a novel idea. It isn't just the topic of a book. It is what we must do as believers in Jesus Christ. It is what is imperative, and especially in these last days. Our witness depends on it.

I pray we have grabbed your attention. This book isn't to make money. It isn't to seek fame. In fact, I am so convinced of this that, instead of publishing this book to paper it is being offered as a free e-book to get the message out. It is only to be a beacon to God's world-wide, great big wonderful Church. A beacon to reunite. A light that guides us to come together like we never have before and stand reflecting the love of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

It is our duty to reach as many as we possibly can for the kingdom of God. It is what we have been commanded to do in order to let people know the truth – the truth that can literally set them free.

We can get past our divisions. We can work together to study the word and find the answer to our differences in belief. We can unite across our dividing lines and be, not many churches, but God's one true Church – The bride of Christ, the one He is preparing a great marriage supper for. It isn't for a single congregation, or an organized denomination. It is only for His Church that is made up of true born-again believers from every denomination. Let's love one another as our Savior commanded. Let's do it for Jesus! Let's quit dividing God's world-wide, great big, wonderfully saved, Church!