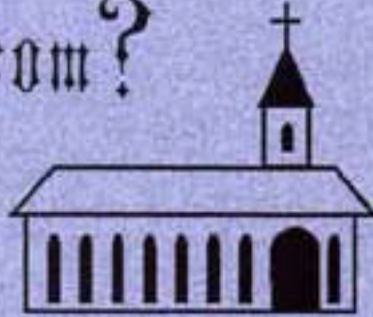


# Where Did They All Come From?



Baptist



Mormon



Lutheran



Catholic



Church of God

By Jefferson David Tant

## **IF CHRIST BUILT ONLY ONE, -- Where Did They All Come From?--**

In the beginning of the gospel age, there was but one church, and now, 2000 years later, according to some reports, there are over 1,200. How did this happen? People wonder where they all came from. Is this division and confusion what Christ intended? Let's examine this situation to see just what the Word of God teaches on this matter. It is a matter of utmost importance that demands our careful attention.

In Matthew 16:18, Christ promised: "upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." Consider two aspects of this statement. (1) The church would belong to Christ. It is *his* church, and *he* has the right to direct its affairs. He is its head and king. It is not a democracy governed by the will of the people. Christ claims "all authority" (Matt. 28:18), and the apostle Paul said that God "put all things in subjection under His (Christ's) feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23), He further identified Christ as "King of kings" (1 Tim. 6:15). (2) Christ's claim is singular--"my church." He did not say he was going to build "a" church or "the church of your choice" or "500 churches."

Just before Christ was arrested and crucified, he spent some hours in prayer. A part of his prayer is in John 17: 20, 21: "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me." Christ prayed that *all* who believe in him might be *one--united*, even as he and the Father were one. The Scriptures teach that the Godhead consists of three beings--God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Three separate beings, yet complete oneness, as they are united in purpose, work and divine nature. The Scriptures also teach that husband and wife are no longer two, but one (Matt. 19:6). Obviously there are still two people, but in the relationship that God intends, there is harmony and unity--oneness.

Christ's promise to build his church was fulfilled on Pentecost in Jerusalem c. 33 A.D. (by the common reckoning of time). The record is in Acts 2, according to the promises Christ had made. In Mark 9:1, he said that some then living would not die "until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." In Acts 1:3-8, just before ascending to heaven, he instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the appointed time, and then in Acts 2 it all happened, as the Holy Spirit's power came on the apostles. Peter's sermon on that auspicious day cited the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 concerning the beginning of the church or kingdom of God. That which belongs to Christ is a kingdom in the sense of his authority as King, and is a church in the sense that those who belong to Christ are "called out" of the world to be a separate people.

Now, look at the religious world. Do we see the unity for which Christ prayed? Do we see the harmony that is in heaven? Can we picture the Father being a Pentecostal, Christ a Lutheran and the Holy Spirit a Mormon? Or can we imagine the Paul establishing the Methodist Church while Peter is working to begin the Baptist Church, and at the same time John is planning to establish the Presbyterian Church across town? That gives us the picture of one believing that baptism is by immersion, another believing it is by sprinkling water, and the third not even practicing baptism at all. That's a far cry from what Christ prayed for. And that means that what we have in the religious world is the *opposite* of what Christ prayed for. Yet we have people who

*thank God* for all the denominations. Are they thankful for the division and confusion that denominationalism has brought to the world? But division is not from God, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33). Furthermore, in Christ's prayer for unity, we note that he stated that if his followers are "one," the result will be "that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" (Jn. 17:21). Now, if unity promotes belief, then what does the division and disunity that is prevalent produce? Multitudes have been "turned off" by the division that exists, and have turned away from God in disbelief.

The point is that in the beginning, there were no denominations. It didn't matter whether you were in Jerusalem, Rome, Philippi or Corinth, the church was the same. Oh, there were problems in the local churches, but when Paul was traveling and went into a town looking for Christians with whom to worship, he didn't have 75 denominations from which to make a choice. There were not even *two* denominations. There was only the one body, which was not a denomination. Now, a large city might have more than one local congregation meeting in it (cf. Rom. 16:3-5), but they were of the same kind. They all followed the same creed, the Word of God, as it was proclaimed by men inspired of God, and as it was being recorded for future generations. The foundation of their faith was in this Word, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

### *Faith stands upon the*

#### Holy Bible

For the first few hundred years, basically, this situation continued. But problems were rising. One came late in the 4th Century, with the teaching of a man named Arius. He taught that Christ was not divine, that he was not God incarnate, i.e., God inhabiting human flesh. This had serious implications, and it caused quite a stir among Christians. By this time Constantine was the Roman Emperor, and he was quite sympathetic towards Christianity, unlike previous rulers. He called for church leaders to meet in Nice in 325 A.D. to settle this dispute. The matter was discussed and studied, until there was agreement as to the Biblical teaching that Christ was indeed God in the flesh. From this meeting the Nicene Creed was written, which was bound upon believers of that time. Previously, the believers' faith rested in the Bible, the Word revealed by God, but now we have a book written by men put on an equal basis with the Bible. This marked a major step towards the apostasy, the falling away, that had been predicted time after time by the New Testament writers. (Cf. I Tim. 4:1-4; II Thess. 2:3; etc.) Thus, the faith of many, though not all, rested upon the Nicene Creed, rather than the inspired Word of God.

### *Nicene Creed*

#### Holy Bible

In 380 the Roman Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be the State Religion. Whereas in earlier times Christians were compelled by the sword to deny Christ or die, now the persecution was against unbelievers, who were compelled by the sword to accept Christ, or die. As a result the church grew rapidly, but the people were not truly converted to Christ. They brought many pagan and idolatrous practices into the church, and diluted the truth. By 607, matters had digressed to the extent that Boniface III was crowned as the pope of the church. Some claim that the apostle Peter was the first pope, but knowledgeable historians admit that Boniface was the first one whom the church accepted and who himself accepted the title of "Universal Father." There is no evidence in the Bible or early church history that will allow Peter

to be a pope. (In fact, of all the apostles, Peter is the only one we know for a fact was married, although popes are not supposed to be married. Cf. Matt. 8:14) By the time of the crowning of Boniface, the apostasy or falling away had produced a church which we would recognize today as the Catholic Church.

This church grew in power and influence so that in reality it ruled the world, and the pope had power over kings and emperors. But a division came in 1054 as a dispute arose over where the seat of power for the Church would be. Of the five cities under consideration, Constantinople and Rome were the final choices. The matter was not resolved, and the church divided. The Western Church, with Rome as its center, was then known as the Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern Church chose Constantinople, and has been known as the Greek or Orthodox Church, with various branches in Russia and other Eastern European countries. Now we have another church with different doctrines, so there must be some document that differentiates the Greek Church from the Roman Church. Thus we have the Greek Liturgy representing the doctrines and practices of the Greek Church, and a new book is added to our growing stack. And since the Nicene Creed was the forerunner of the Catholic Catechism, we add the Catechism to the name of the Creed.

Greek Liturgy

*Nicene Creed--Catholic Catechism*

Holy Bible

Most Protestant church history comes from the Roman Church, so we will focus our attention there. As we come to the Middle Ages, history tells us the Roman Church had grown very corrupt and powerful. For example, in the Spanish Inquisition, thousands were put to death for simply owning a copy of the Bible or disagreeing with a Church doctrine. These are well known historical facts. During this time some began to openly oppose some doctrines and practices of the church. Among these was Martin Luther, who as a young man studied to become a priest. He tried to reform the Church, but was opposed at every turn. He finally wrote his objections and nailed them to the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany in 1517. He was excommunicated from the Church in 1520, and the result of this was the beginning of the Lutheran Church from around 1530. This was not Luther's wish, as he begged his followers not to call themselves by his name, but by Christ's. His followers persisted, and in time his teachings were formalized in what is called "Luther's Catechism." So, in addition to the Catholic Catechism and the Greek Liturgy, we have a document identifying the third "denomination." This was a definitive moment in the Protestant Reformation. While Luther did much good, his strong opposition to the system of salvation by works in the Catholic Church caused him to go too far the other way, insomuch that he taught we are saved "by faith only." While faith (and grace) certainly are a part of our salvation, the Bible teaches that we are saved by an obedient faith. "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone" (James 2:24)

**LUTHER'S CATECHISM**

Greek Liturgy

*Nicene Creed--Catholic Catechism*

Holy Bible

About the same time (1534), Henry VIII was king of England. He was married to Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his older brother and the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain (who financed Columbus's voyage to the New World). She produced no male heir to the throne, and Henry wanted out of the marriage. He petitioned the Pope for an annulment, but Catherine's nephew, Charles V, was now the Holy Roman Emperor, and he warned the Pope against such a move. Meanwhile, Henry's eye fell on Anne Boleyn, a young woman in his court. Henry, tired of waiting, broke off from the Catholic Church, set up his own church, made himself head over it, and then could do as he wished. He married six times, and beheaded four of the women. Thus we have another denomination, the Church of England, and another creed book--The Book of Common Prayer. So we can add this book to the stack which is an addition to the Bible. Well, so much for a church built on "noble purposes." This church is known in other nations as the Episcopal Church or the Anglican Church, and has borrowed many of the errors of Catholicism.

*The Book of Common Prayer*

#### LUTHER'S CATECHISM

*Greek Liturgy*

*Nicene Creed--Catholic Catechism*

*Holy Bible*

*Meanwhile, John Calvin and others were leading a reformation in Switzerland. They, like Luther, tried to reform the Roman Church, but with no success. Their efforts finally resulted in the formation of the Presbyterian Church following the publishing of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536. "Calvinism" is based upon the idea of predestination--that before the world God foreordained certain ones to salvation, and others to damnation, without any consideration of the lives of these individuals. In a sense, Calvin said the lives of all of us are "pre-programmed." Consider a brief response to this doctrine. In Jeremiah 7:31, God rebukes Israel for sacrificing their sons and daughters in the fire, "which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind." If it did not come into God's mind, then how did he "predestine" this? This doctrine makes God a respecter of persons, which is denied in Acts 10:34. Furthermore, it negates the free will of man, although Christ said that "if any man is willing" to do God's will, "he shall know of the teaching whether it is of God..." (John 7:17). The formal statement of the basic doctrines of this denomination are outlined in the Westminster Confession of Faith.*

*Westminster Confession of Faith*

*Book of Common Prayer*

#### LUTHER'S CATECHISM

*Greek Liturgy*

*Nicene Creed--Catholic Catechism*

*Holy Bible*

*Unrest came in the Church of England. While the reformers removed many Catholic excesses in the Protestant (protesting) churches, they adopted some practices the Catholic Church had changed from the New Testament order. In the early 1600s John Smythe and others sought to bring the church closer to the Bible, but met persecution. They fled to Holland where Smythe concluded that the Mennonite position rejecting infant baptism was Biblically correct. In 1608 or 1609 he baptized himself by pouring. Smythe and many followers returned to England in 1611, and about 1641 accepted the Biblical teaching of baptism by immersion, rather than sprinkling or pouring, which the Church of England had borrowed from the Catholic Church.. The New Testament teaches that baptism is by immersion in water (John 3:3-5; Rom. 6:3-5, Acts 8:40; etc.), but through the centuries the Catholics had abandoned this and began sprinkling or pouring water for baptism. In time Smythe's movement came to the New World, and the results of their work are Baptist Churches throughout the world. While there are many Baptist bodies with their own creeds, they are pretty well represented by Hiscox's Standard Manual for Baptist Churches. One of the confusing statements in this Manual is on page 22: "It is most likely that in the Apostolic Age when there was but 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,' and no differing denominations existed...'baptism was the door into the church.' Now, it is different...The churches therefore have candidates... give their 'experience,' and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members." Who said it was now "different"? My Bible still reads the same as it did in the First Century, and voting to receive members is not in it. (I have been present at a Baptist church and observed this practice first-hand.)*

*But since the Baptist Church is not described in the New Testament, perhaps some feel they do not have to abide by the teachings of the Bible. The well-known Baptist preacher, Billy Graham, understands the beginnings of the Baptist Church, for in his syndicated column "My Answer," he stated: "The Baptists as a distinct denomination date from the time of the Reformation in the 16th Century" (1960).*

*Another teaching of Baptist churches is the "impossibility of apostasy," which means that once a person have been saved, he cannot be lost: "once in grace, always in grace." Hiscox's Manual states: "We believe the Scriptures teach that such as are truly regenerate, being born of the Spirit, will not utterly fall away and perish..." (p. 67). A rather definitive expression of this doctrine is seen in a tract by Sam Morris, who was pastor of First Baptist Church in Stamford, Texas: "We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul! The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing to do with the salvation of his soul...All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to,...all the sermons he may practice,...all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger...The way a man lives has nothing to do with the salvation of his soul" ("A Discussion Which Involves a Subject Pertinent to All Men," pp. 1, 2). Please note just two or three Bible verses, out of many, which contradict this denominational error. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away...If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:1-6). How can one be "taken away" from the vine who was not a part of the vine? The apostle Paul warns in Galatians 5:4 that "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Question: Is one in a saved state who is "severed from Christ, and who has "fallen from grace?" Question Two: Can one be "severed from Christ" who was never a part of Christ, or "fallen from grace" who was never in grace? Then in Hebrews 3:12, a caution is given to Christians about "falling away from the living God." If it is impossible for one to "fall away," then what is the point of warning against it? There are many such Scriptures that contradict the*

*teachings of men. We now add another book to our growing list of books that are in addition to the Bible--God's book.*

*Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*

*Westminster Confession of Faith*

*Book of Common Prayer*

**LUTHER'S CATECHISM**

*Greek Liturgy*

*Nicene Creed--Catholic Catechism*

*Holy Bible*

*Over a hundred years later, John and Charles Wesley were dissatisfied with the Church of England's cold, formal ritualism. As students at Oxford, they formed the Holy Club, with rules to follow each day in an effort to improve their spiritual lives. Other students made fun of them and called them "Methodists," in keeping with the "methods" or rules that were followed daily. Thus a new denomination appeared within the Reformation--the Methodist Church. It is governed by "The Methodist Discipline." As an example of the respect that Methodists give to this book, note a statement on page 1 (1964 edition): "We have therefore expected that the DISCIPLINE would be administered, not merely as a legal document, but as a revelation of the Holy Spirit working in and through our people." Note that the Church places this human document on the same level as the Bible, the revelation of God. Furthermore, on page 9, we have this statement: "THE CONSTITUTION OF THE METHODIST CHURCH." Somehow, I always thought that the Bible should be the constitution of the Lord's church--the highest document of law. That is the way it is in a nation's government, as the Constitution is the highest authority, to which the final appeal is made in determining points of law. But man has written another document which stands alongside the Bible. The Methodist Church dates from about 1739.*

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*Around 1827, Joseph Smith claimed an angel revealed golden plates containing the message of The Book of Mormon, culminating in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1830. Various other books are authoritative, including Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. Doctrine and Covenants states that unless one practices polygamy, there is no hope of the highest reward in the next life (132:3, 4). This church, popularly known as the Mormon Church, has many doctrines that are quite different, including the belief that the first man, Adam, is now the God of our world, and that he has a body of flesh and bones as we have, even though the D&C (1835 ed., p. 53) taught that the Father is a spirit. The Bible teaches that God is a spirit (John 4:24), and that a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Consider this quote concerning the birth of Christ: "He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the father? He is the first of the human family. Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character who was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in heaven" (Journal of Discourses, V. 1, pp. 50, 51). Does this not imply that Adam (who is now God) came to the earth and had a sexual union with Mary, from which union Christ was conceived? Doesn't that make her guilty of adultery, since she was betrothed to Joseph?*

*Another example of the serious problems that the Mormons' doctrinal books present is the obvious contradiction between the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. The BoM states: "Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable to me, saith the Lord...For there shall not be any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none" (Jacob 2:24, 27). But D&C states just the opposite: "David also received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon and Moses my servants ...and in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not from me. David's wives and concubines were given unto him of me, by the hand of Nathan...and in none of these things did he sin against me save in the case of Uriah and his wife..." (132: 38-39). (I have asked many Mormons to explain this contradiction, with no answer.) A Mormon apostle also taught that Christ was married and had several wives (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4. Pp. 259, 260).*

*The ultimate test of authenticity has to do with prophecy and fulfillment. Among the prophecies Joseph made is that Oliver Cowdery (an early disciple of Smith) "shall continue in bearing my name before the world," even "to the end" (D&C 24:10). Yet Cowdery was excommunicated in 1838 (HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, III, p. 16). Smith also prophesied that those ordained to the ministry would "go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, or the coming of the Lord, which was nigh--even fifty-six years should wind up the scene" (op. cit. II, p. 182). This was written in February, 1835, which means that the end was prophesied to come in 1891. (See also D&C 130:13-16). Obviously this did not happen. Furthermore, Smith made several fantastic claims. He claimed that the Garden of Eden had been located in Jackson Country, MO, and that he and others had visited the altar that Adam had built at Spring Hill, Daviess Country, MO on May 19, 1838 (MORMON DOCTRINE, pp. 20-21). It is evident that Smith also taught that the moon was inhabited by people who were about six feet tall, who dressed like Quakers, and who lived to be about 1,000 years old (See "Young Woman's Journal, vol. 3, 1892 and "Journal of Oliver B. Huntington, vol. 3, p. 166 at Utah State Historical Society.) According to the Bible, this makes Joseph Smith a false prophet (Deut. 18: 20-22). In spite of these and many other serious problems, the Book of Mormon is so revered, that in places where it clearly contradicts the Bible, the words of the Book of Mormon are held in higher esteem.*

*The Book of Mormon*

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*In 1844, William Miller convinced his followers that Jesus Christ would return that year. Many disposed of their property, so as to be ready at his coming. Some assembled on the hills outside their town, and some climbed trees to be ready at the appointed hour. But Jesus did not appear. The disciples were discouraged, and many left. But one, Ellen G. White, rallied the disciples and became the new leader of this Adventist group. Later she claimed to have had a vision of the Ten Commandments, with a halo around the fourth--"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." She concluded that for most of the history of Christianity, people were in error for observing the first day of the week rather than the Jewish Sabbath--the seventh day. But the New Testament teaches that the Old Testament Law was nailed to the cross, and that we should not be judged by the laws of the Sabbath, or feast days, etc. (Col. 2:14-17). II Cor. 3:6-10 also teaches that the Old Covenant has been supplanted with the New Covenant, and therefore we no longer observe animal sacrifices, the Sabbath Day, or plural marriages. Under the guidance of Christ's apostles, the first Christians met for worship on the first day of the week, which we call Sunday (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2). We also note that Christ's resurrection was on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-8), and we know that the day of Pentecost, the beginning of the church, was on the first day of the week (Acts 2). Adventists counter by pointing to the number of times Paul and others went into the synagogues on the Sabbath. That is quite natural. If I were going among the Jews to preach Christ, I would go where I could find them--in the synagogues on the Sabbath. White's book, *The Great Controversy*, became a definitive document for the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which name was adopted in 1846.*

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*In the 1860s, William Booth, a Methodist minister, began doing free-lance work in the slums of London's East End. This led to the establishment of a mission to the poverty-stricken masses. The name Salvation Army was adopted in 1878, and the mission stations became corps, with members organized along military lines. The head is the General, with a chain of command down the line. The Army is known for its relief work in disasters, but it is a religious denomination promising salvation. In Chosen To Be A Soldier (Orders and Regulations for Soldiers of the Salvation Army), it is stated that "2. The salvation soldier must clearly understand that the Salvation Army Articles of Faith follow the main outline of historic Christian teaching as derived from the Scriptures" (p. 21). If that be true, it is interesting that the Army does not practice the observance of baptism or the Lord's Supper, both of which are clearly taught in the Scriptures. Thus it becomes clear that this organization follows the teaching of men rather than the teaching of God.*

***Chosen To Be A Soldier***

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*The next major group to surface was the Church of Christ, Scientist. In 1875, Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy formalized the beginning of this group, whose members are called Christian Scientists. One of the distinctive tenets of this church is its belief that pain and death do not exist--they are imaginary, and just the product of incorrect thinking. In general, Christian Scientists neither frequent doctors, nor vaccinate their children. If one gets "sick," a Christian Science Practitioner is called in to help get one's thinking back on the right track. On occasion, young people have died of various diseases, either because they were not vaccinated, or because their parents waited too late to call in a legitimate doctor. Their authoritative creed is*

*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, authored by Mrs. Eddy. There is also the Manual of the Mother Church (Boston). One of the interesting articles in this Manual is No. XVIII, "No more communion...The Mother Church of Christ, Scientist, shall observe no more Communion seasons." Thus with the writing of a pen, Mrs. Eddy discards one of the most important memorials that God has ever given man--the Lord's Supper--given as a weekly reminder of the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. (Cf. Matt. 26:28, etc.) The church does not practice baptism, either.*

*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*

***Chosen To Be A Soldier***

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*Soon Charles Taze Russell appeared with many prophecies. His group began about 1879 as the Millennial Dawn Bible Students Association. Today it is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. This group has its own version of the Bible, The New World Translation, and has changed various Biblical doctrines to fit Russell's teachings. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses, as they are known, teach that Christ is neither eternal nor divine, but a created being--Michael, the arch-angel. Through the years, the organization has claimed to be a prophet of God, and has made many prophecies which have failed. They said that the rule of the Gentile nations would end in 1914, and that various Biblical personalities would be raised from the dead in 1925 and begin to rule in the world. Various Bible notables were named. "...A resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other faithful ones...we may expect 1925 to witness the return of these faithful men of Israel from the condition of death and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representatives of the new order of things on the earth" (**Millions Now Living Will Never Die**, p. 88). They built a house in San Diego, CA for these dignitaries' residence. The house was finally sold, as for some reason these men did not take up residence there. (Perhaps they were not raised from the dead.) The organization publicly declared that the end of the world would come in 1975. When this did not happen, various explanations were given to soften the significance of a false prophecy. The Bible informs us that*

*the prophet who makes a prediction which does not come to pass is not a prophet of God. "How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously..." (Deut. 18: 21-22) Thus the Lord identified a "false prophet." Can we trust the teachings of the false prophet known as the Watchtower? An example of their teaching which contradicts the Bible is the following: "What, then, does Christian baptism signify? It is not a washing away of one's sins, because cleansing from sin comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:7)." (**The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life**, p. 183) Compare this with what the Bible says, as Saul of Tarsus was told to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). The Watchtower's false statement about the purpose of baptism is taken from one of their many official doctrinal books which we add to our growing stack.*

### *THE TRUTH THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE*

*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*

#### ***Chosen To Be A Soldier***

*The Great Controversy*

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*Holy Bible*

*Late in the 1800s, we have the rise of Pentecostal and Holiness churches. This grouping includes the Assemblies of God, the Church of God, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Church of God in Christ, etc. For the most part, they share a belief in miraculous manifestations today, such as speaking in tongues, miraculous healing, and some include hand-ling poisonous snakes. (Unfortunately, several snake handlers have met an untimely death, which leads me to believe that what they practice today must not be what is mentioned in Mark 16:17-18, for Christ promises no harm to those in that day who drank poison, handled snakes, etc.) One of the doctrines that is quite common among these de-nominations is that of salvation by "faith only." "7. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. We believe, teach and firmly maintain the Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith alone (Rom. 5:1...)" (DISCIPLINE OF THE PENTECOSTAL HOLINESS*

CHURCH). In fact, that teaching is prominent in most Protestant denominations. But we contrast that with the statement by the Apostle James in 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone" That is as plain a contradiction as one can find. You will observe that the denomination's creed book cited Romans 5:1 (along with other Scriptures), but if we turn to that passage and read it, we learn that something has been added along the way, for the Apostle Paul says in Romans, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The problem is, the denominations have added the word alone to their doctrine. The Scriptures do teach that we are justified by faith, but never does it teach that we are saved by faith alone. There is a big difference. In truth, we are saved by an obedient faith. That's the whole point of James 2. Another similar denomination that springs from the same source is The Assemblies of God, which was formed in 1914. In their writings, they state that "It wasn't until 2 years later that the new fellowship saw the need to establish a set of doctrinal standards." Thus we have their STATEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS. (I thought the Bible had already been established as "a set of doctrinal standards.") These two denominations pretty well represent similar groups, and we add two new creeds to the increasing stack.

*Discipline of the Pentecostal Holiness Church*

*Statement of Fundamental Truths*

*THE TRUTH THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE*

*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*

***Chosen To Be A Soldier***

*The Great Controversy*

*The Book of Mormon*

*The Methodist Discipline*

*Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*

*Westminster Confession of Faith*

*Book of Common Prayer*

**LUTHER'S CATECHISM**

*Greek Liturgy*

*Nicene Creed--Catholic Catechism*

*Holy Bible*

*We could go on and cite hundreds of such examples. We could refer to the Nazarene Church, the Moravians, the House of David, the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, the*

Church of Daniel's Band, the Worldwide Church of God, the Pillar of Fire, etc., but these should illustrate the point of how the religious world that claims to follow Christ has become so divided. And all of these books that are used in addition to the Bible have one thing in common--**they were all written by men who were not inspired of God.** If these men had been inspired of God, they would not have contradicted what God said, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace..." (I Cor. 14:33). Truth does not contradict itself, and God's word is truth (John 17:17). Our Lord had something to say about such doctrines of men. He rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for adding their own traditions to the Law of Moses, and said: "But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt.15:9). All the books we have cited are indeed the "precepts of men," and Christ said that those who follow such doctrines make their worship vain, worthless. That's something that needs to be taken seriously.

### **IS THERE AN ANSWER TO THIS CONFUSION?**

Thankfully, God has given clear guidelines that can solve the problem. There are two basic principles that we need to understand that will greatly help us.

#### **The Seed Principle**

In Luke 8, Christ gives the Parable of the Sower, and tells of a farmer planting seed in his field. He spoke of different kinds of soil, and how the seed responded to the type of soil in which it was planted. He makes a spiritual application of the parable by stating that the kingdom's "seed is the word of God" (v. 11), and thus illustrating how different kinds of soil (the heart) react to and receive the seed--the Word of God. Now consider the first disciples. What spiritual name would we give them? They were Christians, weren't they? Well, what kind of Christians were they? Baptist-Christians? Catholic-Christians? Nazarene-Christians? They were "none of the above." They were just Christians, for there were no differing denominations then. And what was it that made them Christians? It was the seed of the kingdom--the Word of God--"for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God" (I Pet. 1:23). Thus the seed of the kingdom, the word of God, was planted in the hearts of men and women, and the fruit it produced was a Christian. In the natural realm, one cannot plant tomato seeds and grow watermelons. It just won't work. And a tomato seed that may have been preserved for a thousand years will still produce only a tomato when it is finally planted. In the human world, when you see a woman who is pregnant, you don't have to wonder whether or not she will produce a baby elephant or a baby iguana. God's natural law dictates that she will produce a human baby. The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. If the seed of the kingdom, the word of God, produced only Christians in the first century, that's all it will produce today--only Christians and Christians only. One cannot become a Mormon by following the Bible, the Word of God. It takes the Book of Mormon. One cannot become a Methodist by simply following the Bible. It takes the Bible plus the Methodist Discipline. Nor can one become a Catholic by following Luther's Catechism. That would take the Catholic Catechism. And the same applies for every human denomination and every human creed. It takes something in addition to the Bible to produce something other than just a Christian.

#### **The Principle of Authority**

This second principle is clearly shown in Colossians 3:17, where the Holy Spirit instructs us, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Notice what is commanded: whatever we do in "word"

(teaching), or in "deed" (actions), is to be "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (by his authority). If a policeman knocks on your door and says, "Open up, in the name of the law," that means he is there by authority. When you see him in his uniform with a badge, that signifies the authority by which he comes. If he is a plainclothes officer, he will produce some identification so that you will know by what authority he comes.

*In the spiritual realm, we must demand the "authority" by which one comes. The Bible warns us: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). But how do we "test" the spirits? Many claim they have a revelation from God, so how do we discern? There are at least three things in particular that will help us to determine whether someone's teaching is "from God."*

***In the first place***, we can know that **no** new revelation is from God. How can we be so sure of that? Because the Scriptures plainly declare that God's revelation is complete, finished. While he was on the earth, Christ promised his apostles that when he returned to the Father, he would send the Holy Spirit, who would "guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13. See also John 14:26) Now, if Christ's promise came to pass, then the apostles had "all the truth" revealed to them. That leaves no "new" truth for subsequent generations. In Jude 3, we are told to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." The expression "once for all" means that "the faith," the system of doctrine or belief, was given in that age for all time and for all people. That leaves no room for so-called new "revelations" for any self-proclaimed prophet or spokesman for God today. Also, we are told that God's "divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (II Peter 1:3). If that be true, then there is nothing that we can learn about living and serving God that has not already been revealed. In view of these Scriptures, when any man or woman, pope or prophet, priest or preacher, claims to have a new revelation, we can know that it has not come from God. We must remember that there are many Scriptures that warn us about false prophets, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds" (II Cor. 11:13-15).

Some might ask, "Well, why don't we need new revelations today? After all, the world has changed much since the Bible was written." Yes, the world has changed, but human nature has not changed; God's plan of salvation has not changed; and Truth has not changed. If we believe in an all-knowing and all-powerful God, do we not believe in a God who has the wisdom to provide a plan for all ages and all people, that does not have to be changed and "updated" in conventions held every few years? That is one reason that the Bible deals so much in timeless principles, rather than in dealing with the details of fashion and culture that come and go. God doesn't tell us how long men's sideburns must be, or whether or not women should wear earrings made of silver rather than gold.

**A second consideration** has to do with a respect for the silence of the Scriptures. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who was enticed by the Moabite King Balak to curse Israel. Balaam refused at first to do this, but finally succumbed to a bribe. When he opened his mouth to utter a curse, blessing came forth instead. Balak was furious, and questioned Balaam about this treachery. Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you had sent to me,

saying, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the Lord, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the Lord speaks, that I will speak" (Num. 24:13). Do you see the point. Without permission, Balaam said he had no authority to do anything, even though it might seem good to him. So many times people tell me today, "But I don't see anything wrong with..." whatever is under discussion. That is not the point. The point is, do you have permission, or authority, from God. If the Scriptures are silent, we must remember that silence does not give permission. If you don't believe that, just try to borrow your neighbors car without his permission! Then explain to the police that it seemed like a good idea to you, even though your neighbor had not authorized it.

The apostle Paul understood this, as reflected in his letter to Philemon. Paul had converted one of Philemon's runaway slaves, and was now sending Onesimus back to Philemon. Paul wrote Philemon that he would like to keep Onesimus as a help to himself, "but without your consent I did not want to do anything..." (Phile. 14). Here was Paul, an inspired apostle of Christ, who did not presume to do something that seemed good to him, without permission, even from another human. How much more should we respect this principle in matters that pertain to God?

One further passage will reinforce the idea that we cannot act without authority, and that silence does not give consent. The Bible teaches that the Old Testament priests were to be chosen from the tribe of Levi. God instructed Moses to bring forth Aaron and his sons, "and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve Me as priests...It shall be a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him" (Ex. 28:40-44). Nowhere is there a statement forbidding those from other tribes to serve as priests. But does silence give consent for others to serve? Note in Hebrews 7, where the priesthood of Christ is considered, that there had to be a change in the law before even the Son of God could serve as a priest, "for the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests" (7:11-14). Why could not Christ serve as a priest under the Law of Moses? Because he was not a Levite, but was of another tribe, and Moses spoke nothing about men from Judah serving as priests. Could the point be made any clearer? The fact is that silence does not give consent, and the fact that the Lord has not forbidden something does not mean that we have permission to act.

**A third consideration** that helps us discern if someone or something is from God is that we can compare what is taught by anyone with the Standard of Authority--The Word of God. Even if one does not claim to have a new revelation, that person can still teach that which is contrary to the revealed truth in the Bible. Jesus claimed "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). If we are to serve our King, we must respect his authority. Consider the simplicity of applying this principle of authority.

**(1)The names that we wear.** People often ask me, "What church do you attend?" I say that I am a member of a church of Christ. And why that name? Because that designation is found in God's Word, as Paul sent greetings to the church at Rome from "the churches of Christ" (Rom 16:16). The churches sent their greetings by means of Paul. Now, that is not a formal denominational name. It is simply one of several terms used to identify the people that belong to God. The Bible contains other terms: church of God (I Cor. 1:3); kingdom of God (John 3:5), body of Christ (Eph. 4:12); church of the living God (I Tim. 3:15); bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 22:17); etc. They are all Scriptural, but note that they all make some reference to the one who "owns" the church, the one who built it. (In general, we use the designation "church of

Christ" to avoid confusion with denominations of men who may use a Biblical name.) Then I ask my friend, "Of what church are you a member?" He may reply "The Methodist Church." "And what is the source of that name?" I may ask. "Oh, it is a name that was given in fun by fellow students of the Wesley brothers because of the methods they were using to improve their spiritual life." QUESTION: Does such a designation (or any man-made name) honor God, the one who "owns" the church? Where in the Scriptures would we go to show that such names are used "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (by his authority)? There is no such place.

Individually, we are known as Christians--that's all. The reason is because we find this in the Scriptures--"and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:27). Once I was invited to a Bible study being conducted by some Seventh Day Adventists. As I was sitting in a room waiting for the discussion to begin, I was conversing with a young man sitting next to me. In talking about our religious backgrounds, he asked me, "What are you?" I replied, "I am a Christian." His response was, "Oh, I see you are trying to be funny." I assured him that I was quite serious about that, and explained the idea of being just a Christian, and a Christian only, as they were in the New Testament. He thought that was an interesting concept, and apparently it had never dawned on him that one could be just what the early disciples were--nothing else. And I might ask someone, "What are you?" and the reply might come, "I am a Lutheran." "Oh, I thought you might be a Christian." "Oh, yes, I am a Christian--a Lutheran Christian." Now, dear reader, don't you see that this is where the problem arises, where division comes in? It is the denominational names that help to separate us. And following after men is one thing that the Scriptures clearly forbid. Consider the Holy Spirit's attitude toward division and following after men in I Cor. 1:10-13: "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" When division began to come, and the disciples began following after men rather than Christ, they were condemned. Now, if the inspired Scriptures condemned the wearing of men's names 2000 years ago, how has it become right in the sight of God for men to call themselves after Luther or Wesley, or by any other name of human origin today? Thus we make a choice: shall we wear designations that come by human authority, or names that come by divine authority? Which will please the one who died for us? The Word of God instructs us: "but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God" (I Pet. 4:16).

**(2)The organization of the church.** The church we read about in the New Testament had no central organization, no headquarters, no pope, president or board of directors. Each church was independent and autonomous. Qualified men were to be selected in each local congregation to be spiritual leaders. These qualifications are outlined in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, as Paul gave instructions concerning setting in order the leadership of the churches. These qualifications have to do with knowledge, purity of life, family arrangements, and general character traits. These spiritual leaders are called by different terms, which reflect the work that they do. They are called pastors or shepherds, as they are given responsibility to care for and feed the sheep in God's fold (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; I Pet. 5:2). They are referred to as elders or presbyters since they are to be chosen from those who are more mature (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 3:6). They are also known as bishops or overseers because of their leadership roles in their local churches (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 3:1, 2). (Different translations use all the aforementioned terms.) Also, consider the fact that nowhere in Scripture do we find men wearing titles of honor, such as "Father" or "Reverend." In fact, Christ specifically forbade such in his denunciation of the Pharisees who loved to wear special clothing and wear special titles that set them apart

from the "common" people. "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:5-12). Such teaching does not prohibit referring to our fathers in the flesh by that designation (cf. Eph. 6:2), for the context of the passage is clearly referring to the using of religious titles. That is why preachers seeking to follow the Bible refuse to wear special robes or wear such titles as "Father" or "Reverend," etc.

*It is worthy of note that in the Bible there was never a "one man pastor" system over a local church. There was always a plurality of men who were appointed to serve. And these men were never appointed to oversee any organization or group of churches. They were given charge to "shepherd the flock of God among you" (I Pet. 5:2), not the flock (church) or organization somewhere else. We also note that these were to be men who were married and had believing children (I Tim. 3:1, 4-5; Titus 1:6). This is what the Scriptures teach. This is done "in the name of the Lord."*

*When we look at the denominations of men, we find many contrary practices. Most denominations install a single "pastor," as opposed to the Lord's plan for a plurality of men serving. (By the way, the "pastor" in the New testament is not the same as the preacher or evangelist. They are different functions, as can be seen in Eph. 4:11 and other passages.) It is also significant that these men must be married, for the reason cited in I Tim. 3:5 and Titus 1:6. But we have denominations of men who, in some cases, forbid these men to be married (as does the Catholic Church), or who may often appoint unmarried men to serve as pastors, bishops, etc. The Mormon church appoints young men to serve as elders, which seems a bit strange. Then there is the matter of the Scriptural pattern of local church government, as opposed to district, statewide, national or worldwide leaders and organizations. In the New Testament, the local churches were autonomous, self-governing bodies. Now, by whose authority do we have these departures from the Biblical pattern--the authority of Christ, or the authority of men?*

**(3)The worship of the church.** *God has ordained that Christians gather together to encourage and strengthen one another, and to offer worship and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father. The Bible teaches us about acceptable worship in our assemblies. Christ declared that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). The only way we can worship God "in truth" is to worship him according to the standard of truth--the Bible, for "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). You see, our worship is designed to please God, and not ourselves. The idea so many have is that our worship should entertain us. When we design our worship to please ourselves, we are guilty of practicing the "self-made religion" that is condemned in Colossians 2:23. In the Old Testament, Cain worshipped God, but God did not accept it (Gen. 4:5). Why was it not accepted? Because it was not worship by faith "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous..." (Hebrews 11:4). Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), we must conclude that acceptable worship must be according to what God has revealed, not according to what simply pleases man. What, then, has God revealed?*

*(a) There is the teaching of God's Word. In different passages we find the admonition to teach, and when you visit the assemblies of churches that follow the Bible, you will find the Word being taught. This is in keeping with Paul's admonition to Timothy to "preach the word" (II Tim. 4:2). We do not teach sewing, furniture making, or how to make hats. We do not teach you how to take care of your horse. (I saw an ad in the newspaper where a prominent denomination was offering such a course. I think the church secretary was a bit puzzled when I called asking what caring for a horse had to do with preaching the gospel.) Now, if our teaching is to be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17), or by his authority, where do the Scriptures authorize the church to teach the care of horses? Frankly, I don't know of anything in the Bible that remotely authorizes such. Thus the question is, are such things of God, or of men?*

*(b) Another part of our worship is partaking of the Lord's Supper--the Communion. Jesus had instituted this memorial feast shortly before his crucifixion (I Cor. 11:23-26). This was a primary reason that the disciples came together on the first day of the week in Acts 20:7--to "break bread," which Bible scholars agree is a reference to taking the Lord's Supper. The elements used were unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (grape juice fits the description). The implication from Scripture is that the disciples met every first day of the week for this observance, and scholars who have studied the history of the early church agree that this was the universal practice. For this we have authority. But when we look at the churches of men, we find that they have almost universally changed this sacred memorial. Baptist Churches generally take the Supper once a month; Methodist and Presbyterian Churches take it once every three months; Jehovah's Witnesses take it once a year; Catholics and Episcopalians can take it every day; the Salvation Army and other groups don't take it at all. If someone complains that the Bible doesn't say to take the Supper every Sunday (in spite of what history says), we need to point out what may be called a necessary implication. When the Law of Moses said that Israel was to "Remember the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8), which Sabbath did God have in mind? It was obvious to Israel that every Sabbath was meant. In the same way the early disciples understood that they were to remember the sacrifice of Christ every Lord's day. And thus it is with those following the New Testament pattern today.*

*With respect to the elements used, the Mormons use crackers and water; Catholics often offer only the bread to the congregation; others use strange and different elements. I talked to a young woman from the Methodist church who told of a service where they used potato chips and Coke for the Lord's Supper.*

*As we look at the situation, it is obvious that there is much confusion and division. How would we ever achieve the unity on this matter for which our Lord prayed? Should we accept the Methodist Discipline, or the Baptist Manual, or the Christian Science Mother Church Manual? Why not just accept and practice what the Bible teaches? Wouldn't that be the simplest plan? It is obvious that in doing this, we can partake "in the name of the Lord Jesus." All other practices are by the authority of men, and our Lord said this makes our worship vain (Matt. 15:9).*

*(c) A third aspect of our assemblies is our contribution--our giving. Our guidelines are given in such passages as II Cor. 8 and 9 where we are taught to give liberally and cheerfully as we have purposed in our hearts. (By the way, "tithing" is a part of the Law of Moses to Israel, and was never a law given to Christians. There is nothing wrong with giving 10%, or more, if you wish, but it is not a law for us.) As to the frequency of our giving, the Lord's instructions to the churches are, "On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" (I Cor. 16:2). Paul was receiving funds to take to needy Christians in Jerusalem because of the famine in the area, and wrote to the*

churches concerning his plans. He didn't want to take up a special collection when he arrived, but wanted to receive funds out of their weekly collections. And this is the practice carried on by churches following the pattern today. These churches do not take collections during weeknight services, nor do these churches engage in business practices, own stocks or have fund-raisers. Many years ago, my father was talking with a Lutheran acquaintance in Chicago who told how they raised money. Some members of that Lutheran Church had connections with some of the breweries in the area, and they would donate several kegs of beer for summer church picnics. Enough beer would be sold to raise considerable money for the church. (They must have been fun picnics.) When you visit a church that raises money in a variety of ways, or takes a collection during a Wednesday night service, you might ask, "By what authority is this done? Is there a Scripture that supports this practice?" In the absence of such Scripture, you know that this is done by the authority of men, rather than by the authority of Christ.

It seems that most denominations understand "the first day of the week" in I Cor. 16:2 means that a collection should be taken every Sunday, but "the first day of the week" with respect to the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), can mean once a year, once a month, or whatever else seems convenient. The fact is, the phrases are exactly the same in the original Greek language, and imply a weekly observance. The "weekly" implication is so strong that the translators of the New American Standard put "On the first day of every week..." in I Cor. 16:2. If they can understand "weekly" with respect to the collection, it does seem they could understand "weekly" with respect to the Lord's Supper.

(d) Singing songs of praise and edification is an integral part of Christians' worship. Most all religious groups include singing in their services, but there is a difference. In churches following the Bible, the singing is a capella--without musical instruments. Scholars agree that this was the practice of the early church for hundreds of years. It was not until the 7th Century, over 600 years after the establishment of the church, that we have the first mention of instruments being introduced into the worship. Now, if God had wanted the instruments, do we not suppose he would have let the early disciples know this? After all, the early church was under the guidance of men directly inspired by the Holy Spirit--the apostles and prophets. It is interesting to note that "a capella" literally means "in the manner of the church." Thus the language itself establishes the practice of the early church. The addition of instruments created great controversy in the Catholic Church, with some of the church's most prominent scholars opposing it. In the Reformation, men such as Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley and many others opposed its use. Charles Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher in London, also strongly opposed its use. Most denominations did not use the instruments in worship, even into the 1800s, until popular demand paved the way. But is "popular demand" the criteria by which we determine truth? Note the following quote from the Presbyterian Church:: "Question 6. Is there any authority for instrumental music in the worship of God under the present dispensation? Answer. Not the least; only the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs was appointed by the apostles; not a syllable is said in the New Testament in favor of instrumental music nor was it ever introduced into the Church until after the eighth century, after the Catholics had corrupted the simplicity of the gospel by their carnal inventions. It was not allowed in the Synagogues, the parish churches of the Jews; but was confined to the Temple service and was abolished with the rites of that dispensation." (Questions on the Confession of Faith and Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, published by the Presbyterian Board of Publications, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1842, p. 55)

The comment is often made, "But the Bible doesn't say not to use the instrument." That is right. But if God had to tell us everything not to do in connection with what we are told to do, the Bible

would be so big we could not carry it! For example, God told Noah to build the ark out of gopher or cypress wood (Gen. 6:14). That's just what Noah did! God didn't have to tell him to "Build it out of gopher wood, but don't use ash, birch, cedar, dogwood, elm, fir,..." If I were to send my son to the store to buy milk and bread, he could not return home with the milk and bread, plus a watermelon, a quart of ice cream, a bag of candy and a jar of peanuts, and be excused simply because I had not named the 10,000 items in a modern grocery store that he was not to bring home. Now, apply this same principle to the elements for the Lord's Supper. Would it be all right to use potato chips and Coke on the Lord's Table just because the Lord didn't tell us not to use them...or apple pie and ice cream? When the Lord tells us "not to exceed what is written" (I Cor. 4:6), it seems reasonable to assume that's what he meant. A case in point would be that of Nadab and Abihu, a pair of Old Testament priests. "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent" (Lev. 10:1-3). Did the two men "exceed what is written?" Apparently so. God had told them where to obtain the fire with which to offer incense. They evidently reasoned that "fire is fire," so it shouldn't make any difference where they got it. After all, God had not told them not to get the fire from any other source, had He? They learned a lesson the hard way. Moses' understanding of this was that we do not honor God, nor consider him to be holy when we do not respect his Word.

Consider this point: If Noah did not have the right to add another kind of wood to what God had commanded, and if the priests did not have the right to add another kind of fire to what God had commanded, and if we do not have the right to add another kind of food to the Lord's Supper, then where would we get the right to add another kind of music to what God has ordained? Some commands are "generic," which would include all in the general class, while some are "specific," which limit the command to what is specified, as the following chart illustrates.

### **Biblical Authority**

<u>Generic</u>	<u>Specific</u>	<u>Unauthorized addition</u>
wood for ark	Cypress (gopher)	pine, oak, etc
<i>build the ark</i>	(tools included, not specified)	
animal sacrifice	Lamb	ant, pig, elephant
<i>go preach</i>	(travel methods not specified)	
food for Communion	<i>bread, fruit of vine</i>	chips, Coke
music for worship	<i>singing</i>	piano, organ, drum

If we seek to follow the New Testament pattern, then there can be agreement. If one asks, "What difference does it make?", do you remember the Scripture that instructs us "not to exceed what is written" (I Cor. 4:6). We should ask, "Is there authority for this addition to our worship?" The Bible gives ample evidence of the practice of the early church. We can read Acts 16:25, I Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16, etc. They all mention singing, and do not include instruments. If some ask, "What did the early church do under the guidance of divinely inspired

*apostles and prophets?" we can be in complete agreement as to the answer. They sang without instruments. Scripture and history both agree on this.*

*Some argue that the Jews used instruments in the Old Testament. And that's right. They also offered animal sacrifices and burned incense in worship. (Should we do this today just because they did it then?) But the question is, "Why did they use the instruments?" The answer is in II Chronicles 29:25, as King Hezekiah is restoring the temple worship after years of idolatry. "He then stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals...harps, and...lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets." Why did the Jews use instruments? Because God had commanded it! Now all we need is a like command in the New Testament. If we can do things just because they are in the Old Testament, then we could also practice polygamy, as David and others had several wives. But the Old Testament is not our law today. It has been taken away and nailed to the cross. (II Cor. 3:7; Col. 2:14; Heb. 8:13, 10:9, etc.) When churches today use the instruments, are they doing this by the authority of men, or by the authority of God?*

*Consider the fact that the early church did not use instruments of music in worship. To this the scholar agree. That early church was under the guidance of divinely inspired men --the apostles and prophets. Now, if God had wanted instruments to be used in worship, don't you think he could have let it be known through the men he inspired?*

*(e) Another important part of our assemblies is prayer. All churches pray, but there are some differences. One obvious difference is that the New Testament pattern calls for males to lead in the public prayers, while many denominations allow women to lead in prayer as well as preach. The Lord's teaching is: "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray..." (I Tim. 2:8). The passage goes on to state: "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man..." (v. 12). Some view this as a chauvinist attitude, claiming Paul was "anti-woman," but God has his reasons for this. Such teaching in no way reduces women to an inferior status, for there is no respect of persons with God, but it simply means that God has different roles for men and women. It has been so since creation, not just since Paul, "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (vv. 13, 14). I have asked women preachers for their authority to do the work of preaching. I have never received a Scriptural answer. So what shall we follow, the teaching of men, or the teaching of God?*

**(5) The work of the church.** *What is the church's role in the world? What work has God given it to do? The Bible teaches that the main function of the church is to help us go to heaven. There are three areas of work mentioned in Scripture. (a) Support for preaching the gospel (I Tim. 3:15; Phil. 4:15); (b) edifying or building up the body (Eph. 4:12); and caring for those in the church family who are in need (Acts 11:29-30). Beyond this, there is no authority. That is why churches following the pattern do not have gymnasiums and fellowship halls, nor do they sponsor Scout Troops, or build various human organizations to do good works. These all may be good, but they are not the work of the church. In the same line of reasoning, a hospital has a certain mission, and we do not expect hospitals to build and maintain a city fire department, nor run the city's recreation program. These are good and necessary operations, but they are not the mission of the hospital.*

*The many things that denominations are involved in, from saving the Florida alligator from extinction to seeking to overthrow civil governments in some countries, to protesting the high*

price of milk may, or may not, be good in and of themselves. But they are not the God-given mission of the church. The function of the church is the saving of souls, and we should not be distracted from that by other causes, however noble they may be.

**(6) The plan of salvation.** There is no more important subject than salvation. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) In this there is general agreement on some vital points. We certainly agree on the part the grace of God plays in our salvation, "for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men..." (Titus 2:11). Some stop there, claiming that we are saved by grace alone, but the Scripture goes further, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present world" (v. 12). Clearly, there are "instructions" God has given us, even as they were given to the jailer at Philippi. If it were not so, then all would be saved, since God's grace has "appeared to all men." But we know that not all will be saved. Yes, salvation is a gift, the free gift of God, but a gift must be received as well as given. More than once has a gift been offered, but not accepted.

(a) Faith is a fundamental ingredient in our salvation. John 3:16 is probably one of the best-known Bible verses: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (See also Heb. 11:6, etc). But are we saved by "faith only?" The denominations teach this. "Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort" (METHODIST DISCIPLINE and Episcopal BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER). Similar statements are made in Baptist and Presbyterian creeds. In fact, nearly every Protestant denomination has a similar statement in its creed. I had a conversation with a young Baptist preacher once, and asked if he believed in salvation by "faith only." He said he did. I then asked him to read James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." He then replied, "That's not the kind of God I serve," and closed his Bible (as he closed his mind). He then admitted that he had never read James, and did not know that verse was in the Bible, but that made no difference. The whole point of James 2 is that we are saved by an obedient faith, not just an intellectual faith. Many Scriptures bear this out, such as Heb. 11:30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days." When did the walls fall? It was after their faith moved them to obey. Was God's grace present? God had told Israel, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand" (Joshua 6:2). They did not fight for the city, and thus did not earn it, but it was given to them by the grace of God. But suppose they had said, "We have faith that God will give us the city, so we will sit and wait for the walls to fall flat." Would they have been surprised when the walls didn't go "boom?" Let's go back to John 3:16 and consider the context, since so many like to quote this verse. We can fully understand the meaning of a passage only when we examine the context--the surrounding verses. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (vv. 14-16). Please notice that Christ being "lifted up" was likened to the serpent being "lifted up." As a result of the Israelites grumbling, God sent fiery serpents among them. When the people repented, God told Moses to make a brass serpent and hang it on a pole. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived" (Numbers 21:8-9). Do you see the point? It was not enough for the people just to believe, for they had to do something--look upon the serpent! "Faith only" would not have saved them. I find it interesting that the main verse of many who claim that "faith only" saves, is the very passage that teaches that obedience must be coupled with faith.

Furthermore, if "faith only" saves, then we have a problem with certain Jewish rulers: "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). Were they saved? Not if they refused to confess Christ. Furthermore, James, in rebuking the idea of faith without obedience chided his readers with this statement: "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). Dear reader, the doctrine of "faith only" is simply not founded upon the Word of God.

(b) Repentance is quite necessary. Christ gave the call to repentance when he told the people that "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Repentance is a change in heart and life, as we turn from serving Satan and sin to serving God and righteousness. Many profess to believe in Christ, but do not bring about change in their lives.

(c) Christ teaches us that we should not be ashamed of him, but that we should confess him before others, and he will then confess us before his Father (Matt. 10:32).

(d) So far, there is pretty general agreement on the terms mentioned for salvation. But when it comes to baptism there is great controversy. The Bible is very clear on this matter, but for some reason denominational doctrines take opposite views. Please carefully consider some pertinent verses:

*Mark 16:16: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."*

*John 3:3-5: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. "Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He can not enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"*

*Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

*Acts 2: 38: "And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

*Acts 22: 16: "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'*

*Gal. 3:27: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

*1 Peter 3:21: "And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

*Other Scriptures could be cited, but these illustrate the point very well. In Mark, Jesus coupled baptism with faith before salvation: Belief + Baptism = Salvation. Most denominational doctrines*

turn this around, and make it Belief = Salvation + Baptism. Then Jesus said one cannot enter the kingdom unless one is born of water and Spirit. (John 3:3-5). I believe the Spirit there has to do with the Word of God which the Holy Spirit has given to us, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God" (I Pet. 1:23). That "seed" through which we have been born again has been identified as the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), and it is the Holy Spirit that has given unto us the Word of God, which we call the "Bible." But what is the "water" in the passage? It cannot be the water of our physical birth, as some claim, for Christ said in John 3 that a man must be born "again" of water and the Spirit. The only reasonable explanation of this is that he is referring to water baptism.

Then in Acts 2, when Peter had convinced the people at Pentecost that they had crucified the Son of God, they asked what they must do. Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Was baptism necessary for them to receive forgiveness? That's what the Bible says. The next Scripture we cited was the instruction given to Saul of Tarsus (whose name was changed to Paul) that he was to be baptized and have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16). Did the water take away his sins? Obviously not. It was Christ that took away his sins, when Saul met the conditions. Since Christ is the giver of salvation, he has the right to put any conditions on it that he wants. Just as Jericho was a gift to Israel, but God had the right to put conditions on the reception of the gift. The next verse we referred to was Galatians 3:27, where reference is made to being "baptized into Christ." We would all agree that salvation is "in Christ," i.e., in a spiritual relationship with him (Eph. 1:3). How does one get into this relationship? God's word says the final step that puts us into Christ is baptism. Since salvation is in Christ, and we are baptized into Christ, can we be saved without baptism? The answer should not be difficult. The final verse quoted is comparing the salvation of Noah and his family, who "were brought safely through the water," to our own salvation, and plainly states that "baptism now saves you" (I Pet. 3:20, 21). Many denominational preachers would read that "baptism saves you not," but the Holy Spirit said otherwise. The passage goes on to state that it is in baptism that we appeal to God for a good conscience. How, then, can we claim to have the good conscience, the conscience that is free from sin, before we make the appeal to God in baptism? The claim may be made, but the Word contradicts the claim.

There is an Old Testament story that may serve to illustrate the part water has to play in our salvation. In II Kings 5, an army captain came to the prophet Elisha to be healed of his leprosy. Naaman was told to go wash in the Jordan River seven times, and his health would be restored. At first he was furious at such a dumb instruction, but at the urging of a servant, he repented and went to the river. When he came up the seventh time, his skin was like that of a little child. Now, what cleansed him? It was not the water, but God, who bestowed his grace and mercy upon Naaman. But would he have been cleansed if he had not obeyed by going into the river? Similarly, the water of baptism does not cleanse us from sin. God does that through his grace and mercy. But God has connected water and cleansing from sin in the same way that he connected water with cleansing from leprosy. The truth is that our salvation is a combination of grace and obedient faith.

Question: Can one reject the purpose of God, and still be saved? When the prophet John was preaching about the coming Messiah, the record says "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized with the baptism of John" (Luke 7:30). What was God's purpose for them? To receive the baptism that John taught; but they refused. What is Christ's purpose for us? "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved..." (Mk. 16:16).

*But what do denominational creeds say? Consider two examples. From the STANDARD MANUAL FOR BAPTIST CHURCHES, p. 20, Note 8, we read, "Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of 'baptismal regeneration'; but it is essential to obedience, since Christ has commanded it." Now that's a bit strange, isn't it? Baptism is not essential to salvation, but baptism is essential to obedience. The only conclusion that can be drawn from that is that obedience is not essential to salvation. Therefore we can be saved without obeying Christ. I have in my possession a copy of a page from a Bible given to a girl by a Baptist Church. Under the heading of "Church Record" it states: "June 18, saved. August 2, baptized." That's just the reverse of what Jesus said in Mark 16:16, which states that we are baptized before we are saved. We must also consider the words of inspiration in Heb. 5:8-9: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." Is obedience necessary to salvation? We would be better served to follow God's Word rather than man's creeds, as Paul declared in Romans 3:4: "let God be found true, though every man be found a liar."*

*Some teach that all you have to do is "receive Jesus into your heart," and you will be saved. Such teaching is almost universal among denominational preachers. Does it seem strange that there is no such teaching in all the Bible? John tells us that "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Note that the Bible says that if you receive Christ, you have the right to become a child of God. Obviously it is possible to believe that he is the Christ, as many do, and yet not become a child of God through obeying his will. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Some say we don't have to obey Jesus in order to be saved. Therefore we don't have to love him, either. That doesn't make sense, does it? The clear implication of this is that there is something that we must do beyond just "receiving" Christ. We note that "many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). Obviously, there is something more required than simply "receiving" or just "believing." Illustration: When a child turns 16, he has the "right to become" a licensed driver. That does not make him one, for he may be required to take Driver's Ed, pass a written exam and take a driving test.*

*Another example, cited earlier, of how men have changed what God has said is taken from THE TRUTH THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE, p. 183, a Jehovah's Witnesses' publication: "What, then, does Christian baptism signify? It is not a washing away of one's sins, because cleansing from sin comes only through faith in Jesus Christ." Do you see what the doctrine of men has done? It flatly denies what Ananias told Saul: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). In my mind, salvation is something pretty important. I believe I'll stick with what God has said. Sadly, most Protestant denominations have ideas on baptism that are contrary to what the Bible says.*

*Some want to be saved like the thief on the cross, who died with Christ. When he asked Christ to remember him, Christ promised that "today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). "There," they say, "the thief wasn't baptized, and he was saved." Abraham wasn't baptized, either, nor were Moses and Elijah. Why? There was no such command. The command for baptism came after the death and resurrection of Christ, as we see in Mark 16:16. The thief couldn't have obeyed the command of Christ, even if he had wanted to, for it had not been given. Furthermore, we note that the will, covenant or testament of a man does not come into force until death. The Bible also recognizes this point of law. "For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men*

are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives" (Hebrews 9:16-17). When did Christ make the promise to the thief? Before he died. When did Christ's "last will and testament" come into effect? After he died. And there is another point to consider, if we can be saved like the thief, then we don't have to believe in the resurrection of Christ. Romans 10:9 reads that if you "believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Did the thief believe this? Obviously not, for Christ had not even died, much less be saved from the dead. Remember the old adage, "That which proves too much, proves nothing."

Some claim that "Baptism is only an outward sign of an inward grace." I cannot count the number of times I have heard that. The statement is made to negate the importance of baptism. For the sake of argument, I will concede that baptism is "an outward sign." Does that make it any less vital? Consider circumcision of the male child in Israel. Circumcision was the "sign" of the covenant God had with Israel. Could one be a true Israelite without the "sign?" Read the passage in the Old Testament that told how they were to circumcise even foreigners if they wanted to be a part of Israel. And when God sent the plague of death upon the firstborn in Egypt, what did God tell the Jews to do if they were to escape this? They were to take the blood of a lamb and sprinkle it on the doorpost of the house, "And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt" (Exodus 12:13). Questions: Could one be an Israelite without the "sign" of circumcision? Could one be spared from the plague without the "sign" of blood? Can one be saved without the "sign" of baptism? The Word of God speaks plainly!

### **Shall we sprinkle, pour or immerse?**

Yet another consideration about baptism has to do with whether baptism is by immersion in water, or by the sprinkling or pouring of water. Once again, the Scriptures are quite clear. There are three areas of evidence that present the proof that we need: (1) the meaning of the original New Testament language--Greek; (2) the practice of the early church, and (3) the confirmation of Biblical scholars. The Greek word for baptism is "baptizo," and any Greek lexicon informs us that this means to "dip, plunge, submerge or immerse." There are other words that would be used if "sprinkle" or "pour" was intended. And what was the practice of the early church? Romans 6:3-5 gives us an idea. "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Do you see the picture that God has given? Our baptism is a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We die to sin, are buried with Christ in the waters of baptism, and then as Christ was raised from the dead, so we also are raised from the watery grave to a new life. (See also Col. 2:12; Acts 8:38-39; John 3:23, etc.) Biblical scholars all agree that this was the practice of the early Christians, and sprinkling or pouring did not gain complete acceptance until 1311 when a council at Ravenna declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent. Even the Catholic Church, which does not practice immersion, understands what the Bible teaches. "St. Paul alludes to the manner in which Baptism was ordinarily conferred in the primitive Church, by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the descent of the body into the grave, and the ascent is suggestive of the resurrection to a new life. St. Paul obviously sees more than a mere symbol in the rite of Baptism" (... St. Joseph New Catholic Edition, 1961, p. 199, commenting on Romans 6:3-6).

*An interesting fact of history: the Church of England, Presbyterian and Congregational churches all allowed immersion until the Westminster assembly in 1643. Some bishops, seeing how much more convenient sprinkling was, came before Parliament, insisting that "the devil of immersion ought to be legislated out of the realm, it is so troublesome." When the matter came to a vote, it was 24 to 24. Dr. Lightfoot was chairman, and he cast the deciding vote to eliminate immersion. In 1644 Parliament acted upon this, repealing laws about immersion. Those who were not sprinkled were to be treated as outlaws (from EDINBURG ENCYCLOPEDIA, Vol. 3, p. 236). Thus God's will was overturned by a vote of humans who acted on their own authority, rather than the authority of Christ.*

### **WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?**

*The discussion in these pages presents but a glimpse of the application of the Biblical principle of authority. We could go on to show this principle in so many different areas. But if these principles are true, and they are what God has taught us, then we need to give careful attention to II John 9: "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." What this says is that if we go "too far" and do not stay within what Christ has taught, nor respect his authority, then we "do not have God!" That's pretty serious. That's why those who really seek to follow Jesus are so insistent on finding "book, chapter and verse" to authorize what we practice and teach. On one occasion the religious leaders came to Christ in an effort to discredit him, and asked, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" (Matt. 21:23-25). Of course they refused to answer him, because they saw they were trapped. They had asked a legitimate question, but their motives were wrong. But it's a good question that can be asked of those who teach things that are contrary to what the Scriptures teach: "By what authority do you do teach or practice these things? Is your authority from heaven, or from men? **If the answer cannot be given from Scripture, then we cannot accept it. Having God's approval is much too important to neglect.***

*We are warned about adding things by our own authority. "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6). God has always been very protective concerning his Word: "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2).*

*Some have asked, "But if it is all so simple, why don't we all see it alike?" That's a good question, which brings up the final consideration of ...*

### **The Counterfeit Principle**

*If I were to counterfeit money, I would need to go a good job. If I tried to pass off a \$20 bill that was purple with a picture of Mickey Mouse, I wouldn't be very successful. So I would need to make a good counterfeit. And most people don't really care if their money is genuine or not. If it looks good, they will take it and spend it. But then some sharp bank teller or U.S. Treasury agent will look at it and can discern that it is a fake.*

*Now, what is Satan's job in the world? To deceive. What better way to deceive than through counterfeit churches--counterfeit religion? In fact, the Bible warns about this. "For such men are*

*false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds" (II Cor. 11:13- 15). Who are these men, these servants of Satan who appear as servants of Christ? Who else could they be but the preachers who teach the doctrines of men, but who present them as the doctrines of God? We are cautioned in I John 4:1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." How can we test the spirits? All we have to do is compare what is taught and practiced with what the Scriptures teach. Sadly, many people don't care. "Let's start going to church," someone says. "The church down the street has a beautiful building, and they have a great recreation program." But do they teach the truth? "Well, the preacher has some good lessons, and he's really a nice guy." But does he teach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Time and again our Lord has warned us about false prophets (cf. Matt. 7:15, etc.). The responsibility is upon us to discern truth, not just to listen to what someone else tells us. If we do not have a love for the truth, then we set ourselves up to be deceived. Paul writes about Satan's "power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (II Thess. 2:9-12). Do you see how important it is to be diligent in our search for the truth? If we are not diligent, then we are just setting ourselves up to be deceived, and to be lost eternally!*

### **ISN'T SINCERITY ENOUGH?**

*You say you are religious? You go to church? You believe? Is that all it takes? Please consider the words of Christ: "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matt. 7:21-23). What does it mean to practice "lawlessness?" It means practicing something for which there is no law, no authority. Do you see the supreme importance of "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Col. 3:16)? If you remember, Cain was religious. He offered sacrifices, but God refused to accept them. The reason his sacrifices were rejected? Because they were not by faith (Heb. 11:4). Abel's offerings were by faith, and faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). So we must conclude that God will only accept worship and service that is according to his Word. What seems good to us may not seem good to God. What pleases us may not please God. (Isa. 55:8-9) The apostle Paul asks why his Colossian readers are submitting to the decrees of men "in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col. 2:20-23). Notice the reference to "self-made religion." Too often people want to worship God according to what pleases them, rather than according to what pleases God. People have told me, "I wouldn't go to a church that didn't have..."--whatever it was that "turned them on." It didn't matter whether God wanted it or not; they wanted it.*

*As to sincerity, consider the apostle Paul. Before he became a Christian, he sincerely served God. On one occasion, as Paul defended himself in court, he said he had lived his "life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day" (Acts 23:1). Obviously he was sincere, but*

*in his sincerity, he blasphemed God, put Christians in jail, and participated in the death of Stephen (Acts 7). Later, as he stood before King Agrippa, he went over some of these things, and confessed that although he was most sincere he was also most mistaken: "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Do you see the point? Paul was sincere, but he was mistaken. His sincerity did not make him right with God. He had to change. Consider this: a person may be sincerely mistaken, but once truth is presented to such a person, one of two things will happen--either the person will cease to be mistaken, or the person will cease to be honest. Sincerely worshipping God in error will do no more good than taking cyanide while mistakenly thinking it is aspirin. The cyanide may get rid of the headache, but death is a pretty drastic "cure." My friend, in order to be pleasing to God, one must be sincerely right. Sincerely wrong is not acceptable. God has warned us that "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12).*

*We certainly understand this principle in other matters. In taking medicine, we want to be right. Would you be willing to take a prescription that you knew was in error, just because it tasted good? Or, if you were taking a prescription, and someone was able to show you from research data that the prescription was potentially fatal, would you continue to take it just because you had confidence in your doctor, or just because your parents may have taken it? I don't think so. Would sincerity on your part overcome the negative results of bad medicine? Obviously not. A person who takes poison, while mistaking it for good, will still die. It has happened! Now, if we show such concern for our physical life, should we not show the same concern about our eternal life? Do not think that merely being sincere will ensure your entrance into heaven.*

### **IS THE BIBLE SUFFICIENT?**

*Some question the sufficiency of the Scriptures, claiming we need more documents, creeds or information. I suppose that's why we have so many different church creeds. There are various reasons as to why men think we need these, but one of the most telling statements is one that the Roman Catholic College of Cardinals gave to Pope Pius III:*

*"Of all the advice that we can offer your Holiness we must open your eyes well and use all possible force in the matter, namely, to permit the reading of the gospel as little as possible in all the countries under your jurisdiction. Let the very little part of the gospel suffice which is usually read in mass, and let no one be permitted to read more. So long as people will be content with the small amount, your interest will prosper, but as soon as the people want to read more, your interest will fail. The Bible is the book which more than any other, has raised against us the tumults and tempests by which we have almost perished. In fact, if one compares the teaching of the Bible with what takes place in our churches, he will soon find discord, and will realize that our teachings are often different from the Bible and oftener still, contrary to it" (preserved in the National Library of Paris, Folio #1068, V. 2, pp. 650-651).*

*If one is looking for a reason to discourage the reading of God's Holy Word, the foregoing would be as good as any. In fact, the Church seems to think that the Bible may even be dangerous. "The very nature of the Bible ought to prove to any thinking man the impossibility of its being the one safe method to find out what the Saviour taught" (QUESTION BOX, 67, 1913 edition). Other statements claim that the Scriptures are not sufficient to show us the way of salvation.*

*But what does God have to say about this? Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would teach the apostles "all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 14:26). A short*

time later, he promised that the Spirit would guide them "into all the truth" (John 16:13). If that happened, then there is no "new truth" or "other truth" that we need today. If it did not happen, then Christ is a false prophet, and we might as well for-get the whole matter. The apostle Paul claims in II Tim. 3:16-17 that the inspired Scriptures are quite sufficient, so "that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The apostle Peter wrote that God's "divine power has granted to us every-thing pertaining to life and godliness..." (II Pet. 1:3). It seems reasonable to conclude that God has given us a sufficient revelation, and that we need none of the doctrines and traditions of men to help us. If God is all-powerful and all-wise, as the Good Book claims, then he had the ability to provide us with a guide that would suit all nations for all time. Perhaps this is why a strong curse was pronounced upon anyone who would tamper with God's revelation, even if an apostle or an angel preached something different (Gal. 1:6-9). "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (v. 8). And the Bible closes with a clear warning: "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19). There is abundant evidence that this warning concerning the book of Revelation applies to every word that God has revealed to us through the apostles and prophets. We have no right to add or take away one word from the Bible. It is complete. It is final. "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6) The system of faith that God gave to us has been "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). There are no new revelations. There is no new truth. No pope, pastor, president nor parent has the right to add one word, to change one word or to delete one word!

### **A PLEA FOR UNITY**

Please consider the importance of the inspired statement in Ephesians 4:3-6, where we are urged to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Think with me on this. How many Gods are there? We know there is only one true God. In the world there are many gods (I Corinthians 8:5, etc.), but they are false Gods. If one is sincere in worshipping a false god, does that make it right? Obviously not. How many hopes are there? One? But why not have every person choose the "hope of his choice?" Because we know that "one" means "one." How many faiths are there? Some thank God for many faiths, that we may all choose the faith which suits us best. But the passage still says there is one faith. And how many bodies are there? Again, the answer is "one." And what is that one body? God says that the spiritual body of Christ is his church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). So, how many churches does Christ have? One! But someone objects, "That's narrow-minded." But is it being narrow-minded to preach the one God, when there are so many gods in the world? It is interesting to note that so many of us can agree on "one God, one Lord, one Spirit and one hope," but then all of a sudden, when we get to "one body, one faith and one baptism," "one" doesn't mean "one" anymore. Some churches claim there are two or three baptisms, but God says there is now only one. The others have either ceased or are in the future. If we are divided, who has caused the division, those who say that "one" means "one," or those who maintain that it must mean something else?

### **CONCLUSION**

If someone came into your home, and taught you out of the Book of Mormon, and you received the teaching, what would you become? A Mormon, of course. There is no way on earth you could become a Methodist by following the teaching of the Book of Mormon. If you accepted the teaching of the Catholic Catechism, wouldn't that make you a Catholic? And if you accepted the teaching of the Baptist Manual, what would that make of you? Right--a Baptist. Even if you never saw a Baptist Manual, the teaching of the Baptist Church conforms to the doctrines presented in the Manual. And on it goes with every denominational creed.

**But if one came into your home, and taught you just from the Bible, and you received the teaching in faith and obedience, what would that make of you? Just a Christian! That's all God wants you to be--nothing else, nothing less, and nothing more. Just a Christian. Isn't that what you want? It is if you really want to go to heaven.**

There are millions of people all over the world who claim to be just Christians--not members of any denomination. They meet together as churches of Christ (or they are known by other Biblical designations) that are independent, autonomous congregations. They have no headquarters, nor denominational creed. They all have the same book--the Bible. And they answer to God according to his Word. You are invited to investigate. **Your eternity depends upon knowing and obeying the truth. Take the time to find out. It will be a wise investment.** I wish I knew the words to convey the seriousness of the matter. If I were to convince you that a bomb had been planted under your house that was set to go off sometime in the future, you would certainly waste no time in searching to find it. You would not delay, thinking that it would make no difference. You would not put it off, thinking that it was an interesting thing to look into sometime in the future. No, you would not want to gamble with your very life, but would begin the search immediately. **Of how much greater importance is your eternal life?** Is your eternity not worth the time and effort to search out truth? We know not when life will end, nor when the Lord will come again. We are simply warned: "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (Matthew 24:42-44). **Are you ready for that great day?** "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?" (II Corinthians 13:5).

Consider this final thought. Must one believe the Bible in order to obtain salvation? If you answer "yes," then think about the following questions. Must one believe the teaching of the Methodist Church in order to obtain salvation? Must one believe the teaching of the Baptist Church in order to obtain salvation...Presbyterian teaching...Episcopal teaching...Lutheran teaching...etc.? If your response is "no," then consider the implications of this. If one must believe the Bible, but **does not need** to believe the doctrines of any particular denomination, **then those denominational doctrines must not be true, for one must believe the Bible, the Truth,** in order to obtain salvation. If the foregoing conclusion is not valid, where is the reasoning faulty?

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Is God pleased with division among those who claim to follow him? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No (I Corinthians 1:10)

2. *Is denominationalism the answer to Christ's prayer for unity?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No (John 17:17-23)
3. *Is it possible to have unity today based upon Denominational Creeds?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No (Matt. 15:9)
4. *Is it possible to have unity today based upon the Word of God?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No (Ephesians 4:1-7)
5. *If you are a part of that which is contrary to the Word of God, will he accept you?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No (Matthew 15:13)
6. *Does God want us to separate ourselves from error?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No (II Corinthians 6:14-18)
7. *If you are uncertain about the answer to the above questions, are you willing to take a chance with your soul's eternity?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
8. *If you are convinced that the conclusions drawn from this material are true, are you going to do something about it?* \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

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