

## THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF THE N.T. church - UNITY OF THE BODY # 2

Intro:

- A. As we consider the restoration movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries I believe it is important for us to consider what it is that these men were looking at as they read the New Testament scriptures.
  - 1. The N.T. church is very distinct in nature - we are in the world, but not of the world.
  - 2. Our Head is Jesus Christ and His body is made up of individuals not congregations or churches.
- B. What we saw in the restoration movement there are four distinct characteristics of those who are in Christ Jesus as they view things differently in many ways.
  - 1. Absolute Truth (Guide - One Faith)
  - 2. Gospel Plan (Entrance - One Baptism)
  - 3. **Udenominational (Unity - One Body)**
  - 4. Biblical Authority (Head - One Lord)
    - a. In all things that pertain to ---- Worship, Mission, Appeal
- C. We noted in our first lesson last week the first two areas of agreement with the scriptures and those of the restoration movement.
  - 1. This morning I want to focus on our third point - which pertains to UNITY of the ONE BODY.
  - 2. From our slide in the history of the N.T. church in August - note point number two of the 5 Cardinal principles of restoration:
    - a. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party and sectarian names.
- D. One of the fundamental flaws in the religious world today is a total misunderstanding of the biblical (scriptural) usage of the term "church". Biblically speaking the term is used in two manners (spiritually) and thus imperative to our understanding of the restoration principle.

### II. IS CHRIST THE HEAD OF MANY CHURCHES? - to understand the answer we must first understand the term "church"

- A. "Church" as is used in the universal sense ---- by UNIVERSAL - I am speaking about All Christians Everywhere in the world!
  - 1. This is seen in the teachings of Christ - "I will build MY CHURCH" **Matt. 16:18**
  - 2. By his apostles - directed into all truth by the Holy Spirit - "there is ONE BODY" **Eph. 4:4**
  - 3. By the principle of the Human body - "He is also head of the BODY, the CHURCH" **Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23**
  - 4. When you examine the scriptures you will find descriptions of "the church" in the universal sense.
    - a. Note the table below:

Description	Passage	Jesus As	Relationship
"the church"	Acts 8:3 ect ect	The one who calls	The called out
"the church of God"	Acts 20:28	Paid the Price	Purchased by God
"the body of Christ"	1 Cor 12:27	Headship	Members
"the kingdom of God"	Rom 14:17	Kingship	Citizens
"the family of God"	1 Tim 3:15	Son	Children
"the temple of God"	1 Cor 3:16	High Priest	Serve/Worship
"the church of the 1 <sup>st</sup> born"	Heb 12:23	Heir	Fellow Heirs

- B. The second usage of the term “church” in the N.T. is that of the “LOCAL SENSE” - by that I mean Christians in a specific area
1. There are 4 major observations in this area of our study that we must take note of:
    - a. Who agree to join together in fellowship (**Acts 9:26**).
      - (1) **Acts 9:26** (NKJV) - 26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.
    - b. Who worship in a common assembly – (**1 Cor. 11:18**)
      - (1) **1 Corinthians 11:18** (NKJV) - 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.
    - c. Who work out of a common treasury – (**1 Cor.16:1-3**)
      - (1) **1 Corinthians 16:1-3** (NKJV) - 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.
    - d. Who submit to a common oversight – (**Acts 14:23; 20:28**)
      - (1) **Acts 14:23** (NKJV) - 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
      - (2) **Acts 20:28** (NKJV) - 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
  2. This is clearly denoted and seen in the N.T. - of Individual Christians banding together.
    - a. “the church of God which is at Corinth” (**1 Cor. 1:2**)
    - b. “the church of the Thessalonians in God” (**1 Thess. 1:1**).
    - c. “the churches of Galatia” (**1 Cor. 16:1**).
    - d. “the churches of the saints” (**1 Cor. 14:33**).
    - e. “the churches of Christ”(**Rom. 16:16**).
    - f. “the churches” (**Acts 8:3; 15:41**, etc., etc.).
  3. What must be noted in the scriptures is that the individual is never referred to as the church - in fact the individual has very specific descriptions in the N.T.
    - a. In relation to God’s calling: “saints” (**1 Cor. 1:1-2**)
    - b. In relation to the gospel: “believers” (**1 Thess. 1:7**)
    - c. In relation to Christ: “Christians” (**Acts 11:26**)
    - d. In relation to the Father: “children of God” (**1 John 3:1**)
    - e. In relation to Christ’s teaching: “disciples” (**Acts 6:7**)
    - f. In relation to one another: “brethren” (**1 Cor. 1:10**)
- C. This to my knowledge is the only way in which “church” is used in the spiritual sense in the New Testament.
1. All other uses are outside of the New Testament and therefore are additions to God’s word.
  2. It is with this in mind that we now turn out attention to what is commonly heard and taught in the “religious world called Christianity”

### **III. DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES** - firstly to note is that a denomination is larger than the “LOCAL SENSE” and smaller than the “UNIVERSAL SENSE” of the word church in the N.T.

- A. What is a Denomination?
1. IT IS A DIVISION - like our currency
    - a. By definition:
      - (1) 4 : a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single legal and

administrative body - Merriam-Webster

- (2) “A group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy, e.g., Anglicans, Presbyterians, Catholics etc.” - <http://library.christchurch.org.nz/FamilyHistory/Glossary>
  - b. In the World Christian Encyclopedia with regards to the USA stats 2006:
    - (1) There are over 1,000 “Christian” religious organizations in North America alone. Each has their own set of beliefs, policies and practices.
    - (2) “When discussing such topics as the divinity of Christ, salvation, heaven, etc. it would be hopelessly unwieldy to explain the beliefs of each faith group.”
    - (3) More recent stats show 3,500 religious main stream protestant religious bodies today.
  2. These groups are bound together by their distinctive beliefs and yet divided from each other because of their distinction of their unique belief systems.
    - a. Each has its own earthly headquarters which determines the beliefs and the congregations, in many groups even the clergy is determined.
      - (1) The baptist 1608
      - (2) The presbyterians 1560
      - (3) The methodist 1740
      - (4) The pentecostals 1898 ect etc.
  3. This is distinctively different from what we find in the N.T. church established on the day of Pentecost AD 30/33 - recorded in **Acts 2:47** to which the Lord adds the saved.
    - a. Starting dates of these denominations are as such:
      - (1) 606 Roman Catholic Church
      - (2) 1054 Greek Orthodox Church
      - (3) 1530 Lutheran Church
      - (4) 1534 Church of England
      - (5) 1536 Presbyterian Church
      - (6) 1611 Baptist Church
      - (7) 1739 Methodist Church
      - (8) 1830 Mormon Church
      - (9) 1844 Seventh Day Adventists
      - (10) 1886 Jehovah’s Witnesses
      - (11) 1887 Church of God
      - (12) 1908 Nazarene Church
      - (13) 1911 Christian Church
      - (14) 1914 Assemblies of God
- B. The concepts of Denominations - (i.e., Unscriptural Concepts . . .)
1. “We’re all going to heaven, just by different routes.” (**Matt. 7:13,14; John 10:9; 14:1-6; Acts 4:12; 2 John 1:9**)
    - a. **Matthew 7:13** (NKJV) - 13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.
      - (1) **Matthew 7:14** (NKJV) - 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.
    - b. **John 10:9** (NKJV) - 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.
    - c. **John 14:1-6** (NKJV) - 1 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And where I go you

- know, and the way you know.” 5 Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
- d. **Acts 4:12** (NKJV) - 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
  - e. **2 John 9** (NKJV) - 9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.
2. You must not challenge or oppose somebody else’s church (faith). (**2 Tim 4:2-4; Tit 1:10-2:1; Prov. 27:5; Matt 15:7-9**)
    - a. **2 Timothy 4:2-4** (NKJV) - 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.
    - b. **Titus 1:10-2:1** (NKJV) - 10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. 1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:
    - c. **Proverbs 27:5** (NKJV) - 5 Open rebuke is better Than love carefully concealed.
    - d. **Matthew 15:7-9** (NKJV) - 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”
  3. All denominations (belief systems) are OK. They are “parts” or “units” of the one church and the one faith (**John 15:1-8; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 4:17**). (Different Kinds???)
    - a. **John 15:1-8** (NKJV) - 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
    - b. **1 Corinthians 1:10-13** (NKJV) - 10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

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- c. **1 Corinthians 4:17** (NKJV) - 17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.
4. The Church is composed of congregations.
    - a. These congregations are organized or associated together in some manner to provide unity of doctrine and cooperative work.
    - b. These congregations provide financial support to dependent & supplementary social organizations (colleges, hospitals, missions, etc).
    - c. These supplementary organizations are seen as necessary for the church to fulfill a collective, universal social and spiritual mission.
      - (1) Seen in - The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual
        - (a) "THE WIDER FELLOWSHIP OF BAPTISTS: Because churches are the only Christian organizations provided for in the New Testament, it may be said that they are the only ones really essential to the accomplishment of the purposes of Christ.
        - (b) "Experience, however, has demonstrated that churches in fellowship with one another are able to fulfill the work of the gospel more effectively than churches alone."
- C. Unfortunately over the years there are some things we need to think about even in the body of Christ with things we say and think.
    1. Churches of Christ declare themselves to be non-denominational.
      - a. NO OFFICIAL organizational structure exist. However, many of these churches view the one church as composed of local congregations, all with the name, "Church of Christ".
    2. SOME of these "Church of Christ" churches are tied together by their connection to a number of colleges, schools, welfare agencies, hospitals, orphan homes, etc. which are designed to aid the Church in fulfilling its "mission".
  - D. Is such pleasing to Christ? - with the constant tug of war
    1. **John 17:20-21** (NKJV) - "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; [21] that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.
    2. **1 Cor. 1:10-13** (NKJV) - Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.
      - a. **1 Cor. 1:10-13** (NKJV) - . . . [12] Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." [13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?
    3. When we look at the mindset of the denominationalism's view of the these scriptures in the way in which they read it:
      - a. **Ephes. 4:3-6** (NKJV) - endeavoring to keep the **unity** (DIVERSITY) of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There **is** (ARE) **one** (MANY) **body** (BODIES) and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; [5] one Lord, **one faith** (MANY FAITHS), (AND) **one** (BAPTISMS) **baptism**; [6] one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
      - b. **1 Cor. 1:10-13** (NKJV) - Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak **the same thing** (DIFFERENT THINGS),-and that there **be no divisions among you** (DIVISIONS)

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<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982

4. BUT HERE IS THE REALITY:
  - a. Truth: Denominationalism is divisive and AGAINST Christ's will.
  - b. Truth: Denominationalism contributes to UNBELIEF.
  - c. Truth: Denominationalism is caused by following TEACHINGS OF MEN.
  - d. Conclusion: Anyone who has participated in denominationalism should REPENT and SEEK the unity Jesus prayed for and Paul implored!
- E. The CURE FOR DIVISION - "SEED ACCORDING TO ITS OWN KIND"
  1. Corn cob has kernels - which produce corn fields
  2. Apples have seed which in turn produce Orchards of apple trees
  3. Acorns produce acorn trees.
  4. In similar manner various manuals and disciplines of denominations produce:
    - a. Mennonites
    - b. Methodists
    - c. Nazarene
  5. But the BIBLE only produces - CHRISTIANS.
- F. In any debate between two opposing parties the truth can be reached by a common standard:
  1. The bible Doesn't teach me to wear one name and you to wear another name- **Acts 11:26**
  2. Or - The Bible Doesn't Teach Me to Be Saved One Way And You Another - Believe, repent, confess, and be baptized into Christ – **Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9; Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:11-13**
  3. The Bible Doesn't Teach Me to Be A Member of One KIND of Church And You Another!! - . . . The Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved – **Acts 2:7 4**
- G. Biblical Unity is clearly defined in the N.T.
  1. The one body is an organism, not an organization. (**Col. 1:18-24**)
    - a. **Colossians 1:18-24** (NKJV) - 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. 24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,
  2. Unity is NOT maintained by bringing all Christians into a "visible body of Christ". (**1 Peter 5:1,2**)
    - a. **1 Peter 5:1-2** (NKJV) - 1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;
  3. Unity is maintained as Christians remain faithful to the revealed TRUTH of God (**Eph. 4:1-6**).
  4. When all men will lay down their creeds, disciplines, manuals, confessions of faith, catechisms, think-so's, maybe's, and subjective feelings, and with an unprejudiced and receptive heart turn to the Word of God, then, and ONLY then, will unity result.

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982

5. We must be committed to being nothing, calling ourselves nothing, obeying nothing, and saying nothing except that which is authorized by the Word of God.

#### IV. **In Conclusion:**

- A. Absolute Truth (Guide -One Faith)
  1. Gospel Plan (Entrance - One Baptism)
  2. Undenominational (Unity - One Body)
  3. Biblical Authority (Head - One Lord)
    - a. In all things that pertain to ---- Worship, Mission, Appeal
- B. TRUTH concerning the Plan of Salvation ---- Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess and be Baptized
  1. **HEAR:**
    - a. **Luke 8:11** (NKJV) - 11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.
    - b. **Romans 10:17** (NKJV) - 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
  2. **BELIEVE:**
    - a. **John 8:24** (NKJV) - 24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”
    - b. **Hebrews 11:6** (NKJV) - 6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
  3. **REPENT:**
    - a. **Luke 13:3** (NKJV) - 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.
    - b. **Luke 13:5** (NKJV) - 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”
    - c. **Acts 17:30** (NKJV) - 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,
    - d. **Acts 2:38** (NKJV) - 38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  4. **CONFESS:**
    - a. **Matthew 10:32-33** (NKJV) - 32 “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.
  5. **BE BAPTIZED:**
    - a. **1 Peter 3:21** (NKJV) - 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
- C. Are You Willing To Obey The Truth of God’s Word Today?
  1. 1 Cor. 12:13 (NKJV) - For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
  2. Galatians 3:26-27 (NKJV) - For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.