

# *I Will Build My Church*

## The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church

### 3 The Church is "One", "Holy", "Catholic", and "Apostolic", Part 2

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January 19, 2020

#### **Ephesians 4:4-16**

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

**5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## To the Glory of God

Now last time we were looking at the four Characteristics of a true, biblical, Church as defined by the Nicene Creed (AD325).<sup>1</sup> And this attempt by the early Church at arriving at "Orthodoxy" was that a real Church was:

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

And so, we began to examine in what sense the Church is "One". And as we got into just what helped the Church to be "One", we began to look at the four aspects that Dr. Luke was "carried along" by God the Holy Spirit to pen down in **The Acts 2:42**, that says:

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

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

1. The Apostle's Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. The "Breaking of Bread" (the Lord's Supper)
4. Prayer

Now keep in mind that this was not merely what some people did. No, Dr. Luke tells us that what made the early Church "One" was that the saved people of the Church that Jesus created by His Life, Death, and Resurrection were devoting themselves, *continually*, to these four aspects of spiritual Life.

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<sup>1</sup> The Creed was updated in AD 381 at the *Council of Constantinople*; but the section concerning the Characteristics of an "Orthodox" Church remained the same.

And so, last time, we were looking at just what Luke meant when he said that the early Church was “devoting themselves” on a continual basis to the *first* aspect, the “Apostles Teaching”, and I want to pick back up at that point today.

So, it is clear from Scripture that from the very beginning, there was an established, body of Teaching that every local Church was familiar with that was called “The Apostle’s Teaching (Doctrine)”, and the *method* or the *way* that the Doctrine of the Apostle’s was actually taught to the people, was probably through a series of systematic Questions and Answers called “Catechisms.”

Now the Question always comes up, “*Why should God’s people today, with all of our technological advantages, spend the time being systematically taught the Doctrine that the Apostles formulated over 2,000 years ago?*” And the Answer is that the Bible itself clearly teaches that there are at least six main reasons *why* God’s people should be taught the Word of God and the basic elements of Christianity in a *systematic, ongoing, and formal* method:

1. Because All Believers are *Required* to Know the Truth.
2. Because There are Many Deceivers Determined to Pervert the Way of the Lord.
3. Because Difficult Truths Must be Explained Properly.
4. Because We Live in the Last Days.
5. Because Leaders Must be Raised Up to Teach Each Succeeding Generation.
6. Lasting Unity is Based on Truth, not Personal Relationships.

So, let’s examine each one.

### **1. Because All Believers are *Required* to Know the Truth.**

Firstly, since Christianity teaches that lost people are saved by what we *believe in*, and by what we *trust in*, and by what we *confess*, and NOT by what we “do”; then what we believe in *matters*. But secondly, we must also understand what Jesus meant when He said this in **Matthew 22:37a&38**:

***YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND***

**WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the great and foremost commandment.**

Now notice that Jesus commanded us to love God “**with all your MIND**”, as well as “**with all your heart**”. And this means that what we look at and read and listen to, and what we think about, and what concepts are prevalent in our minds matter to God. Our thoughts and beliefs should all be concentrated on God and His Glory. And that means that it is just as sinful to *believe* wrongly, and to *think* sinfully, as it is to actually *do* something that is wrong.

Look at what Jesus told His disciples as He was preparing to ascend into Heaven from **Matthew 28:19&20**:

**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**

This means that the Church sends members to the ends of the earth so they may preach the Gospel to every creature so that all those who have been chosen by God to be saved, may hear the Voice of God, see Jesus in His Beauty, repent of their Sins, and trust in Jesus (Evangelism) is wonderful. Yet the “Great Commission” is NOT fulfilled until those very same people are baptized (in water by immersion), and then continually taught all that Jesus expects out of them. And then those who say they believe and who have been baptized should follow up that Teaching with an honest and ongoing effort to obey. Now look at what Paul said about this from **Colossians 1:23b**:

**... continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.**

This teaches that one of the most blatant demonstrations of Human Arrogance and Pride is the notion that if a person is saved, he no longer needs to be taught the Bible in an ongoing and systematic way. Paul says here that already saved people are supposed to “**continue in the Faith**” until they become firmly established in it, and

until they are strong enough so they will not move away from the "Hope" that comes only from being truly Born Again.

So, just how long should people, who are already saved, be taught? Paul answers that in **Ephesians 4:13&14:**

**until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;**

... which means until Jesus comes back. But how will we know that we have arrived at this level of spiritual maturity? Paul gives us the Answer in **Ephesians 4:14-16:**

**As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.**

We must remember that, since all genuine believers are all joined *together* into a single Church, we move *together*, and we rise *together*. So, when the lost world sees true, biblical Christianity at work, they should not see mere individuals, who love Jesus. They should see individuals who have all become part of a much *larger* Body that *moves* and *acts* and *obeys* and *follows* and *serves together*.

But that also means that we *fail* and *fall* together. The "Oneness" that we enjoy in Victories and Successes also pertains to Weaknesses and Mistakes. Because the Church is no stronger than its weakest member. It is no more Holy than its most worldly member. So, if we become strong in the Lord, from a *personal* standpoint, our efforts are NOT completed until ALL of those in the Body are strong. And that is a lot harder and takes more time. And it also means that, as we struggle as individual believers to pursue Holiness on purpose, we must also engage in ongoing efforts to help the *entire Church* become Holy. Because *every* member of the Body must become what Paul teaches

here, or the Church is simply not what it is meant to be. And that means that all genuine believers are in this *together*.

So, if Jesus desires that all genuinely saved people arrive at spiritual maturity, if that is the Goal, then the *ongoing* Teaching and Modeling the Truth of Scripture is *required*, or the Church will simply fail. But because it is God's Will that all genuine believers become spiritually mature, God the Holy Spirit will move to *assure* that His Church will engage in those efforts (and so this *WILL* happen).

## **2. Because There are Many Deceivers Determined to Pervert the Way of the Lord.**

If the people of the world were not fallen, then we wouldn't have to worry about the ongoing threat of false Teaching. In the beginning, God made people to worship Him. So, Worship is engrained into our DNA. It is part of "who we are" as people. So, even when people are not saved, they continue to worship. They merely worship something (or someone) else: Money, Sex, Power, Possessions, etc. And they turn their Passion and Love and Devotion that God created in us for Himself onto other things that are passing away.

So, all Salvation really does is to take our Love and Devotion and Worship that we have put on things that have been created and it *restores* those things for God. So, it sets things right. Salvation takes the *dysfunction* of the Fall and *heals* it. Salvation gives new spiritual Life to the spiritually dead individual so that we may have the honor and privilege of *loving* God, so that we may worship Him in both Spirit and Truth.

Now many people don't understand why false Teaching is such a huge Issue. These people say, "*As long as somebody loves Jesus, then it really doesn't matter what they believe.*" But the only reason people say things like this is because they either don't know, or they don't care about the Reality that lost people are saved (and saved people are Sanctified) *only* by what they *believe in*, and by what they *trust in*, and in what they *confess*. Therefore, whatever *informs* and *instructs* our Belief (Faith) matters.

We have to understand that false Teaching is NOT merely a difference of opinion. Disagreements over personal opinions are important, but they do NOT qualify as "False Teaching". Various

*peripheral* Issues that are left up to individual discretion, *cannot*, by definition, rise to the level of being “False Teaching.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet there is real false Teaching out there about which we need to be concerned. “False Teaching” is that kind of Teaching that cannot forgive a single sin or save a single soul. It *dishonors* Jesus, warps the understanding of the Grace of God, and promotes ungodliness. Jude describe both the false Teachers and the false Teaching like this in **Jude 3&4:**

**Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**

Look closely at what he said. First, he says that all false Teachers have two characteristics:

- 1. Those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation**
- 2. Ungodly persons**

Jude says that false Teachers are “ungodly persons”. And this phrase was almost always used in the Bible to denote people who were *sexually* immoral. So, false Teachers are almost always *sexually impure*. But notice that Jude also said that false Teachers are those who have been:

**... long beforehand marked out for this condemnation ...**

... and this means that they are not saved now, and they *never* have been saved. But it also means that real heretics and apostates will *never* be saved. Jude wrote under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit that real heretics and false Teachers have been *marked out*, or *ordained*, or *branded*, or *singled out*, or *chosen*, for eternal

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<sup>2</sup> Because of real shallow Teaching in much of the modern Church- most of the separations that exist among believers today are in categories of disagreements that the Bible says we should NOT separate over.

Condemnation. In other words, they *can't* repent. God *has not* and *will never* grant them Repentance.

Now at this point, something needs to be said. Sadly, there are those within the ranks of visible Christianity that seem to actually *enjoy* labeling other people with whom they disagree as "heretics" and "false Teachers". These people act as though the Goal of Christianity is to find out how many people aren't teaching correctly so they can label them as fast as possible as "heretics" or "false Teachers". But that is NOT the Goal.

The fact that there is a single false Teacher alive should make us all weep. Because Jude teaches here that "false Teachers" CANNOT be saved. So, I pray there are very *few* heretics, even though John says there are "**many**" (1 John 4:1). But we need to understand that simply because somebody is *incorrect* about certain spiritual matters does NOT, in and of itself, make them to be heretics. It takes time to get many areas of Divine Truth correct in our minds, my friends. So, it is very possible that some people may believe and/or teach wrongly about certain Issues (***that are NOT Essential Truth***), and they're just *inconsistent* or *contradictory* about what they say. But that alone does NOT make them to be genuine "false Teachers".

Now yes, they need to be *corrected*. And, of course, they need to be *counseled*, and *helped*, and *instructed*. And yes, they need to repent (maybe even publicly). It isn't okay to ever *teach* something that is wrong any more than it is ever okay to *act* wrongly. But *some* people may simply be making an honest mistake about what they are saying (and/or believing), as they are *sincerely* trying to love and obey Jesus and submit to the Authority of Scripture.

People who agree to and who truly believe the Essential Truths of the Christian Faith are genuinely saved believers, *even if they are inconsistent or contradictory about other Issues that are NOT Essential*. And that means they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They're NOT lost. And they should NOT be treated as though they're second-class citizens or like they're not even saved. They may be wrong, but they're family. And even though they are wrong about second and third tier Issues, they are worth helping.

Now I know whereof I speak because I fall into this very category. For many years of my Christian walk, I was wrong about several Issues. Now, by God's Grace, I was never wrong about Essential Truth, and I



was trying, hard, to get things right, even then. But the truth is that I was *inconsistent* and *contradictory* about several Issues, some of them very important, for several decades. But I was saved. I was born again. Yet, in many quarters, I was treated as though I was a heathen, simply because I either wasn't smart enough to understand, or maybe because they didn't do a very good job of explaining things, or both.

But, eventually, God was faithful, and I got it. Now most Pastors would never stand up here and admit this. But I'm trying to make the point that I didn't get saved when I became Reformed. Now I *did* become much more *biblical*, but I have loved Jesus, and I have desired to obey Him, and follow Him, and delight in Him since the moment I was saved back in 1971. Yet simply because I was ignorant about certain things, some labeled me as a "false Teacher". That wasn't fair then, and it isn't fair now, if we do the very same thing.

So, I pray that, as our knowledge and love of the Truth grows, that our capacity for Mercy grows as well. Because if having Mercy and Patience on people, who may be inconsistent, is looked at as somehow being "compromising", then we have lost Christianity, dear friends, and we have become nothing but modern-day Pharisees. It is *never* wrong to be Merciful, precisely because it takes some people longer than others.

But part of pursuing the uncompromising Divine Truth of Scripture is that we will become *more* Kind than those who are NOT pursuing it. Spiritually strong people are *more* Patient, *more* loving, and *more* merciful than those who are spiritually weak. And, according to Jude, real heretics are "unsavable". So, thank God I *wasn't* a real false Teacher.

Now, secondly, Jude says that false Teachers and false Teaching attacks the Truth along several lines:

- They pervert the Grace of God
- They deny Jesus Christ

... so, false Teaching perverts the Grace of God either by *denying* it (Legalism) or by *abusing* it (Antinomianism). And false Teaching denies Jesus Christ either in His full Deity, or His fully Humanity.

Genuine false Teaching is *always* wrong, and it is *always* dangerous because it keeps lost people lost, and it leads saved people

into unbiblical or ungodly beliefs and practices. Yet false Teaching cannot be “sanctified”. It can’t be fixed. It can *never* be redeemed or salvaged. False Teaching is to be simply *identified, condemned, and then rejected* by the individual believer and the Church at large.

Yet false Teaching will *never* be destroyed in this life. It *always* exists, somewhere. So, even as it is “cast out” from some quarters, it will simply go somewhere else and deceive the simple and unstable souls there. Let’s see what the Apostle Peter wrote about this in **2 Peter 2**:

**But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved**

the wages of unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, *for* a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A *DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT*," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire.

... and this is *why* the Scriptures discuss this subject often.

**Matthew 24:4**

And Jesus answered and said to them, "**See to it that no one misleads you.**

**Titus 1:9-11**

holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain.

**1 John 2:26**

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

**1John 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.

**3. Because Difficult Biblical Truths Must be Explained Properly.**

We live in a time when far too many people are far too unwilling to pay any price for Truth. As I told you last time, 1700 years ago, the Christian Church wrestled for 42 years over a single letter of a single Greek word that pertained to the full Deity of Jesus Christ. And there is only one reason why they did that. They judged the Truth of God's Word to be worth the struggle.

Today, most people avoid hard subjects. It seems that very few people have any appetite at all for deep and profound Truth. Yet most of the cherished Doctrines that we all hold dear today fit into that category. Certainly, the Trinity comes to mind. Yet, how many of us could articulate the biblical Truth of a single God Who exists in three distinct Persons with any degree of expertise? Yet, without it, we don't really have Christianity.

The reality is that the Doctrine of the Trinity had to be hammered out from a careful analysis of the Word of God *before* it became part of Orthodoxy. Yet it was fought against by many, both then and now. Rarely do deep Issues become accepted by the majority. So, sooner or later, we have to realize that the validity of an Issue is *not* found in how many people agree with it. Rather, something is deemed to be true if the Scriptures teach it, period.

Dear friends, even though it is hard, I do not believe that we are better off avoiding hard subjects. If something is *Essential*, then we need to spend the time with it, at least so we can have a "working knowledge" of it. But struggling to learn hard subjects is important also because Ignorance causes even *more* problems. For example, in **Hosea 4:6a**, the Prophet said:

**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...**

... and the Apostle Paul was "carried along" by God the Holy Spirit to say:

**1 Corinthians 2:10-16**

**For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things**

freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For **WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?** But we have the mind of Christ.

... and in **2 Peter 3:15b-18**, the Apostle wrote:

... just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

#### 4. Because We Live in the Last Days.

Even though there has *always* been false Teaching and false Teachers, Scripture teaches that this will become even *more* prevalent as the time, for Jesus to come back, draws near.

##### 1 Timothy 4:1

**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,**

##### 2 Timothy 4:1-5

**I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you,**

**be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.**

## **5. Because Leaders Must be Raised up to Teach Each Succeeding Generation.**

Even though Truth is the single most important thing that we have, the Reality is that Truth has to be *taught*, and it must be *learned*, and grasped by each successive generation, or it will be lost. So, without an *ongoing* examination of “what we believe” and “why we believe it”, all we have is what I call “spiritual Inertia”, the energy (and Passion) of past generations. Spiritual Food, just like Manna, has to be given and eaten and digested every day. We cannot long endure on a Strength that we acquired yesterday.

So, there *has* to be some *way*, some *process*, some *mechanism* devised whereby we know that what we are *believing*, and what we are *teaching*, is the very SAME thing that the Apostles taught. Because only by devoting ourselves continually to *that* Doctrine, *the Apostle’s Teachings*, can we assure that we are a real, biblical Church.

### **2 Timothy 2:2**

**The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**

### **Titus 1:9**

**holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**

## **6. Lasting Unity is Based on Truth, *Not* Personal Relationships.**

Many years ago, I attempted to overcome many decades of racial and denominational Division in this area by holding various Prayer Meetings;, and by inviting other local Pastors to speak in my Church. So, over a two-year period, 104 Prayer Meetings were held, and 104 Pastors spoke from this very Pulpit. I even attempted to merge three other predominately black churches with this one, and even offered to step down and promote one of them to become the lead Pastor. I deeply loved these men and love them today.

But in one of those Prayer Meetings, God dealt with me, unmistakably, that we needed something *higher* and *stronger* and *better* and more *lasting* than human affection for each other. Because there is only one thing that will ever bring any lasting Unity among people, and that is becoming in one mind and one accord about "what we believe" and "what we teach". Other than that, we are simply experiencing an "*emotional* Unity" that will never last.

Yet, almost every religious organization that emphasizes "Unity" is based on personal relationships rather than the Truth of God's Word. And there are several reasons for that:

- It is much harder to get people to agree with Scripture than it is to have some emotional attachment to each other.
- Most people have no idea what they believe or why they believe it.

... yet the Bible teaches that we should all unite around Truth and NOT personal relationships. Case in point is the amazing conflict between two of the giants of the early Church, Peter and Paul:

#### **Galatians 2:11-14**

**But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"**

Now if anything could have stopped the Church dead in its tracks, this Confrontation between Peter and Paul would have done it. Yet it actually made the Church stronger, *primarily* because the only man who walked on water besides Jesus, recognized that Paul was right, and so, he humbled himself and repented. This confrontation should make us all grateful that Jesus *didn't* establish His Church on personal relationships, but on Divine Truth.

Periodically, all throughout Church History, there have been various movements to try to bring “Unity” and “Oneness” into the Church. But without exception, those efforts (as sincere as they may be) have all failed. Why? Because they are always based on human relationships rather than the Truth of God’s Word.

We must understand that human relationships vary over time as people in the Church either grow or *refuse* to grow in the Lord. Thus, any Movement or Effort to unite the Church around human relationships rather than Truth is doomed to fail. Christianity is based on the Divine Revelation given to Peter (as representative Leader of the Apostles) that says:

### **You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God**

So, *any* effort to unite the various religious bodies and traditions *must* be founded on Truth, and on biblical Doctrine, and the ongoing effort to “get the Gospel right”, and *not* on personalities or human relationships.

Now that doesn’t mean that we are not supposed to love each other. We are. But our love for each other is an outflow of two things:

1. Being saved
2. Loving the Truth

### **Aren’t All Catechisms Roman Catholic?**

Sadly, some are. But many aren’t. But our Goal is NOT to simply be “anti-Catholic” anyway. Our Goal is to be “pro-Bible”. The reality is that some things that the Roman religious organization teaches are absolutely correct. They are biblical. And all true Christians should agree with those parts. But many other areas are entirely Man-made, *including how lost people are saved!* And that is NOT okay.

The Roman religious system uses their *own* Catechisms which employ *some* Biblical Truth, mixed with papal edicts, magisterial bulls and writs, and which also employ human reasoning, church tradition, and the result of church councils.

And after seeing how destructive this method became, and after witnessing, firsthand, the many unbiblical practices and beliefs that



were developed from this effort, the Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century penned down other Catechisms that were developed entirely from Scripture alone which were used from the very beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Among them are:

- ✓ The Westminster Catechism (Presbyterian)
- ✓ The Heidelberg Catechism (Reformed)
- ✓ The 39 Articles (Anglican)
- ✓ The London Baptist Catechism of 1689 (Baptist)

These various reformed Catechisms differ significantly from the Roman catechisms in fundamental and vital areas of Biblical Truth, while differing from each other only in the assumptions made in the vague or the unclear Passages.

Simply because the name "Catechism" is used should not offend any reasonable person. As explained above, the name "Catechism" comes from the Greek word which means: *to teach or to instruct*, and is a biblical Word that has absolutely *nothing* to do with Rome or any Man-made Doctrines flowing out from that religious institution.

### **Why Not Just Leave This Up to Individuals?**

First of all, the *Individualism* of the American culture that has manifested itself now for over 230 years has *not* brought forth Godliness or Holiness on any large scale. In my view, this kind of "rugged Individualism" is actually a *hindrance* to Biblical understanding, and of knowing and understanding and obeying Objective, Propositional, and Eternal Divine Truth. So, leaving Biblical Instruction up to individuals to develop and implement and understand as they see fit doesn't have a very good track record. So, each local body should engage in ongoing, systematic Bible Study, *formally and officially*.

Secondly, by allowing the people of the modern Church to "do their own thing" as it comes to Biblical Interpretation and Study has produced the most confused; contradictory; weak; and inconsistent believers that the Christian Church has ever known. This is certainly out of step with the Prayer of Jesus in **John 17** and with the concept of the Church being "One".

The people of the Church today are, by and large, *more* ignorant of God and the Bible than at any time in Church History. So, the very popular method of allowing people to learn the Bible on their own, that has been employed over the last hundred years, has been an abject failure and should be discarded immediately.

We live in a day when personal Opinion has been elevated to the level of being "Truth", while the Divine Truth of Scripture is often relegated to being nothing more than "*that's your opinion*" or "*that's your interpretation*". We must understand that Divine Truth is an eternally fixed Reality that is *not* affected or altered by time, societal changes, human development, or personal preferences. In order for anyone to know God, God's Will, or God's Way, they must rightly and fully understand God's Word. Therefore, the systematic and ongoing teaching of the Scriptures should be the main focus of the Christian Church.

The Great Commission not only commands that we "go and tell", but that we also "baptize and teach". But as we teach believers to obey everything that Jesus taught, we really only have a few options. We can teach God's Word:

- ✓ Inconsistently or Consistently
- ✓ Haphazardly or Systematically
- ✓ Sporadically or Continually
- ✓ With Untrained Amateurs or with Trained and Called Teachers

We want to comprehend *all* that God has revealed in Scripture. We want to not only read the Bible, but to understand it, and to be able, by God's Help, to apply the Truths of Scripture to our daily lives so that we may be found faithful and glorify God in all that we do.

It is only in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> that this almost 2,000 year old practice of ongoing and systematic Instruction (Catechisms) of The Apostle's Teaching fell "out of fashion" with the leaders of the Church. And that lack has produced great ignorance about basic fundamental Biblical Truths in the minds of God's people, which has led to very serious problems in the modern Church:

- God's people no longer know or understand God or God's Word

- A resurgence and acceptance of ancient heresies which have been thoroughly examined and rejected
- Many unbiblical and destructive beliefs and practices becoming popular
- Great confusion and weakness in the lives of God's people
- The Church rocked by repeated public scandals resulting in a loss of respect by the culture
- Blatant sin and wickedness dominating individual lives and entire churches
- A systematic replacement of Edification with Entertainment
- The Sufficiency, Authority, and Primacy of Divine Truth being minimized, downplayed, or outright rejected
- Man being exalted at the expense of God

So, a true, biblical Church is one in which a systematic and continual effort to teach and learn the fundamental Truths of the Christian Faith is a *vital* part of their Worship. And that Body of Teaching, which the Apostles received and wrote down, became known as "The Apostle's Doctrine", or "The Apostle's Teachings", which is otherwise known as the New Testament (Covenant) comprising 27 Divinely Authored Books:

- ✓ 4- Historical Narratives of the Birth, Life, Ministry, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✓ Historical Narrative (Diary) of the first 20 years of the Christian Church on the earth.
- ✓ 21- Letters (Epistles) from Apostles (and designees) which explain what the Birth, Life, Ministry, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus means in our Regeneration, Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification in Heaven.
- ✓ Prophecy.

Together, these Writings were used to instruct God's people in "the Way of the Lord" and contain *everything* we need to be saved, *everything* we need to live our lives to God's Glory as "salt" and "light" on the earth, and *everything* we need to dwell eternally with Jesus in Heaven.

## **2 Peter 1:1-4**

**Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His 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. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.**

This final and completed Revelation of God that we call "The New Testament" (Covenant) is *infinitely* superior to and completely *supersedes* the *partial* and *incomplete* Revelation of God that we call "The Old Testament" (Covenant) in both the way it was given to Man and in what it teaches.

## **Hebrews 1:1-4**

**God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.**

The very *narrow* and *temporary* Ministry of the Apostles, which was characterized by miracles, supernatural signs and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, transformed the world and gave the Apostles the Divine Right and Divine Credibility to make *amazing* Statements that we simply cannot make today:

## **1 Corinthians 11:23-25**

**For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "**This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.**" In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper,**

saying, **"This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."**

## **2 Thessalonians 3:7**

**For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;**

## **1 John 1:1-4**

**What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.**

Now look carefully at what John said here. He said:

**... what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ...**

John is teaching here that the Apostles have the full and complete Truth. God gave *them* the final and finished Revelation of God to Man. And most people would agree with that. But then John goes on further to say that one of the reasons he wrote this Epistle down was so that believers would have "fellowship" with the Apostles. And "fellowship" is defined as *"agreeing with or being in accord with what the Apostles teach."*

In other words, John is teaching that if *anyone* desires to be in "right Relationship" with God, they *have* to also have a "right Relationship" with the Apostles. In other words, because what the Apostles received from God was the *final* Revelation, there is now no such thing as *anyone* having a "right Relationship" with God while being at odds with what the Apostles teach.

Another way of understanding this is that for *anyone* to obtain a "right Relationship" with God, they **MUST** be in accord with what the Apostles teach in the New Testament. So, for example, if they are at

odds with what the Apostles teach, they are NOT in “right Standing” with God.

No human on earth can honestly make a Statement like this. But John *could* and John *did*. And he made it matter-of-factly. No fanfare, no bragging; it's just the way it is. This illustrates the *uniqueness* of the Office of Apostle, and why it is so utterly wrong for *anyone* to lay claim to be an Apostle in our day.

Another amazing Statement about how *easy* and *common* it was for Apostles to receive Divine Revelation and to have Visions was made by the Apostle Paul, in **2 Corinthians 12:1-12**:

**Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows — was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to *my* weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain *from this*, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees *in* me or hears from me. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me — to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.**

These men, the Apostles, did several things that nobody, before or since, has done:

- ✓ The Apostles received the final, full, and completed Revelation of God to Man.
- ✓ The Apostles confirmed that Revelation as being “from the Lord” by many infallible “Proofs” (Signs, Wonders, Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Spirit).
- ✓ The Apostles “saw to it” that this Revelation was written down and distributed to the various Churches.
- ✓ Every other saved person on earth was held accountable to what the Apostles taught.
- ✓ The Apostles had Authority over every other Ministry of the Church.
- ✓ The Apostles suffered to an amazing extent.

So, the early Church was *continually devoting* themselves to this body of Teaching that, collectively, was called the “Apostles Teaching”. And that is what we need to be about as well. And, by doing that, we guard against false Teaching, but we also assure that what we believe and what we teach is true. And that helps us to be a part of the “One” Church that Jesus established, and part of the “One” Church He is coming back for.

Amen. Let’s pray.

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