

The Mystery of Disunity

*Why God Wants the Faithful Divided and
How Elijah and the 144,000 Will Restore Unity*

by

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Chapter 1 – God’s Word or Unity: Choose

Why Disunity From God’s Word?

One of the biggest sources of skepticism towards the Bible is in how those who profess to follow it are divided into innumerable conflicting and oftentimes *warring* religions, denominations and sects. This lack of unity is ironic considering how the Bible is accepted by them all as preserving revelation from God for right living that leads to peace and unity. Of course, as even the outsiders perceive, the question of exactly *what* is the right interpretation of the biblical text is highly debatable, and this is what leads to division over time. There are good scholars with good arguments behind just about every conceivable interpretation out there, each of them sounding convincing. Thus we see people throughout history have broken off into separate belief groups and all with clear scholarly proof to support their interpretation. With time each new division eventually becomes its own religion, denomination or sect with its own distinct Bible-based creed. (Of course *all of these conflicting doctrinal sets cannot be right*, and quite possibly they *all* may be wrong, deviating in some significant way from what the Word of God really intended).

This explains why we have so many different religious groups all full of people who believe they are following what the Bible really says. This fragmentation seems bad on the surface, much as a divorce does. But in a marriage, if there are “irreconcilable differences” or one or both parties is unwilling to change any behavior in the way of a good functional marriage, then a divorce is often the only solution¹. Likewise, not being able to agree with others who prevent you from following your convictions about God’s truth are valid grounds for separation and division. So this is actually a pragmatic and necessary thing for people to do at times.

After the break-up, the first action that such a newly formed group will usually do is to outline their view of what God’s word says in what’s called a doctrinal statement. This also is not evil of itself but quite necessary. For if their organization wants to be able to answer the question of “what do you believe and practice?”, they cannot simply say, “here, we believe this” as they hand out a copy of the Scriptures. It’s much too long and much too ambiguous and requiring too much interpretation to serve as a definitive answer for this important question.

Abandoning God’s Word For Tradition

But the *real* problem comes in later when these groups, which were initially formed in search of and preservation of what they were convicted to be truth, lose their focus on seeking truth. A new focus on simple self-preservation takes its place. When it comes to the point that they will not change their traditionally held core doctrines even after being presented with new findings showing that they are in error (i.e., they break Scripture), now what was initially noble has become corrupt. What was initially based on great ideals has become just another organization that exists to promulgate its tradition rather than constantly revising and changing its doctrinal set as part of a never-ending quest for better understanding and application of the Word of God.

Jesus himself called attention to the tradition basis of the religion of his day, Judaism:

Matthew 15:1-9 (NKJV) — ¹ Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ² "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." ³ He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴ "For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'⁵ "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother,

¹ Divorce is a controversial subject, but bear in mind that Jesus stated that divorce was instituted because of the hardness of our hearts (Mt 19:8), a condition that is still present to some degree in every human today.

"Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"-- 6 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 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.' "

Note that although he was talking to the leaders of Judaism, his words must apply to any Bible-based religion, denomination or sect. *All of them* come to the same point where they decide what their interpretation the Word of God is. To do otherwise would bring costly attrition in terms of membership and income, which is against any organization's overriding instinct of self-preservation and growth in numbers (taking the proper place of "growing in grace and knowledge").

Denominational Unity Only From Fixed Doctrinal Statements

In spite of all the above, one positive that these types of organizations have as a result of their fixed, traditional doctrinal set is a high degree of *unity*. Anyone who joins their group knows going in what they will be expected to believe and do. Everyone who is there acts and thinks more or less the same in unity. Order is maintained. And anyone who at some later date does not agree with these traditions anymore is soon shown the door rather than being allowed to sow discord or sweep in some kind of doctrinal revolution. For any midstream doctrinal change would only lead to the exiting of many others who don't want or agree with a change to the status quo. And if there is proverb from the Bible (and popular movie) that the religions have mastered it is, paraphrased, that "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few"².

I personally have experienced this unity during my decade of involvement with the Worldwide Church of God. It was a joy to be among people who you knew had the same understanding and same practices in worshipping God. I could travel to any city where they had a congregation and knew what kind of like-minded people I would find there ready to accept me with open arms even into their homes without even having met me. We celebrated the same day of rest (Saturday) and celebrated the same biblical feast days on the same biblical calendar schedule³ and were able to meet on these times together, taking time off from work to do so if need be. I have many fond memories of those times together.

However, the WCG was a rare religious organizations that actually dared to tamper with its doctrines when convicted that they were wrong. And as one would expect, as soon as they radically changed the doctrinal set, *disunity* would set in. It was like someone pulling the carpet out from under everyone's feet. Each successive doctrinal change (and there were many) would put some percentage of the membership in the position of being in an organization with which they could no longer agree. Many moved on to find or to *found* another group with which could again agree, or, like myself, left to remain on their own with the only person with whom they could for sure stay in agreement with (well, except for when, as part of my learning, I come to not even agree with myself anymore!).

Again, this separation may sound like a sad event. If so we might need to remind ourselves that when God calls us he is calling us trust him, not to any particular group or set of creeds. He uses groups along the way to teach us things, but our primary allegiance is always to him and his truth as we understand it, not as a group understands it. For none of us can stand before the throne on Judgment Day explaining our actions with the excuse that we only did what our teacher, pastor or rabbi told us. God is not asking us to substitute anyone's judgment for our own, but to learn his standards of judgment as revealed in his Word. Jesus clearly stated this as the standard:

2 John 11:50, or Spock from "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan"

3 Today I would not call the Jewish precalculated calendar invented by Hillel II "biblical."

Luke 8:20-21 (NKJV) — ²⁰ And it was told Him *by some*, who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You." ²¹ But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who **hear the word of God and do it.**"

If that's not a frightening verse to face then I do not know what is. If we accept this verse at face value then much, much more is required of us than we have been led to believe. To be in Jesus' family we must base our actions on what we understand the word of God to say ourselves. There is no middleman to trust in for telling us what to do to please God. We must actually base our relationship with God on doing what his Word says directly, not on what a human religious authority tells us. If you try to operate that way as part of a typical religious group today you will not last very long, of course. And an organization trying to implement this is going to have the continual course corrections that cause it to break up that we already touched on.

Individuals or Families Can Successfully Follow God's Word

Thankfully when you're talking about individuals following the word of God successfully, it's a different story than with organizations. There's much less stopping an individual from adopting this standard than there is for organizations. If this sounds like a contradiction with statements above about how the Bible is ambiguous and hard to understand with 100% certainty, then you need to remember that it's much harder to express and prove your views to someone else than it is to convince yourself. There are many things we are convicted that the Bible teaches which we could never prove to others as right teachings of the Bible. Thankfully, to prove our biblical view to others for them to validate them as correct is simply not a requirement. Quite to the contrary, we need to follow our own convictions and not rely on others opinions or approval. God put enough proofs in the Bible for each of us to be convicted on what it says and to follow that and even lead our families in that way to great success—if we are diligent to dig into it.

The individual must only be willing to make the necessary sacrifices in building his relationship with God. As related above, one of these is often to be willing to separate if necessary from his current group, friends and even family who are generally not prepared to follow the extreme position of "the Bible only." Jesus even noted this would become necessary for those who tried to live this way, confirming that this was the correct thing to do:

Matthew 10:34-39 (NKJV) — ³⁴ "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵ "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; ³⁶ "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his *own* household.' ³⁷ "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

This is the price of following the truth in a world that generally does what's right in its own eyes. We must take up our cross sometimes to follow God. However, lest you become discouraged about this, remember also the promise Jesus gave concerning those who follow the Word of God in today's divisive world:

Mark 10:28-30 (ISV) — ²⁸ Then Peter began to say to him, "See, we've left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left his home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or fields because of me and the gospel ³⁰ who will not receive a hundred times as much here in this world—homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields, along with persecutions—as well as eternal life in the age to come."

You are promised you will meet others that meet the biblical qualification for “family of Jesus” along the way, just do not expect to be gathered together with them just yet.

Unity For New Groups

Short of some forced solution that abandons a Bible basis (such as the one prophesied in Revelation 13 under the Beast and False Prophet), it’s readily apparent that there will be no way to heal the schisms among the Judeo-Christian faiths until the Messiah comes to set them all straight under *his* pure doctrine. Ecumenism (unity among Christian churches or denominations) and Universalism (“all religions are equal roads to heaven”) amount to agreeing to disagree but will not ever bring true unity in the truth either. The most you could achieve from them is tolerance and understanding, not truth or true unity. A necessary focus on what is held in common brings only a watered-down greatest common denominator truth.

But what about small new groups who attempt to maintain their scriptural integrity by staying focused on following God’s Word only? Can they have unity? As already discussed, this indeed is the perennial challenge. As soon as two or more families or individuals who wish to follow God’s Word come together, the age-old problem of the ambiguity of the Bible soon arises again to divide them.

Area of Dispute: The Holy Day Calendar

For example, we see this today among those who in their understanding of proper adherence to God’s Word want to celebrate the biblical feast days⁴. They have come out of traditional Christianity or Judaism after painfully discovering that these religions teach their own tradition in place of the Word of God, with the hope to be different. These groups attempt to follow the festival instructions found in the *Torah*, or the commandments first given by God to Israel to make them wise and set apart from the nations around them. They do so *not* because they believe that works of Torah merit eternal life of themselves, but because doing God’s commandments produces a happier and more blessed life now, in this life. Bottom line, the Bible says that keeping his commandments is pleasing to God, and shows him your love⁵. Yet these still cannot agree on which is the *right* way to reckon the dates of these festivals on the current Gregorian calendar. Here are some of major differences of opinion on just this calendar issue alone:

- Days: Some say the day begins at *sunset* like Judaism observes, others say *sunrise*.
- Sabbaths: Some say it’s a 7th day Sabbath cycle like Judaism observes. Others say it is a lunar- based Sabbath cycle.
- Months: Some begin at the visible crescent moon, others the astronomical new moon, others the *full* moon, and Judaism has a precalculated calendar that usually lags the visible crescent moon by a day.
- Years: Aviv (ripe) barley-based; equinox-based; or the precalculated calendar of Judaism.

That’s a lot of views—all from reading the same Bible (and that’s not even all of them). However, some might still be wondering to themselves at this point if things could still work if you just simply find and assemble with people who already agree on what the right calendar is, or say, who all agree on just doing the Ten Commandments.

What About Just The Sabbath?

Well, let’s just take another example to illustrate how even that is not enough. Observance of the Sabbath day is part of the Ten Commandments (number four) and also dependent on this

4 of Leviticus 23: Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles, and Last Great Day

5 Exodus 20:6; John 14:15

calendar question. So let's say you find a group that agrees to observe of the Sabbath day according to the 7th day reckoning (rather than on Sunday, or according to the lunar cycle, etc.). Great, but what constitutes keeping the Sabbath day? There are many questions on this topic alone and everyone will still have their own ideas, such as:

- Is it a “holy convocation” that requires we assemble like the high sabbath holy days do?
- If so, are we not allowed to travel to meet together using internal combustion engine powered cars or do we interpret Exodus 35:3 as prohibiting a work fire?
- Can you have a fire to keep warm or do you have to turn off your furnace?
- Are we not allowed to use our computer on Sabbath?
- Are we allowed to use electricity at all on Sabbath?
- Do we have to prepare all our food ahead of time or can we make a sandwich if we want to?
- Do we have to talk only about the God and Bible on Sabbath or it OK to share details with each other about ourselves, our work, our lives, our problems, etc.?
- Can you play a board or computer game with family or friends or is that seeking your own pleasure on God's day or is alright as long as it is Bible Trivia game?
- Can we watch TV or movies at all or only if its *Veggie Tales* or *The Ten Commandments*?
- Can we carry money or exchange money with believers on Sabbath or is that prohibited “work”?
- Can we pay for a taxi or bus or gas to travel towards meeting others on the day, the only day most of have to get with like-minded believers, or not?
- Can we go to a restaurant or buy food on occasional Sabbaths or is that illustrated as clearly forbidden in the story of Nehemiah 13?

Eating in Restaurants On Sabbath? That's A Bad Example!

Some may read this list and see a few of them as “bad examples” of debatable issues because they are so “obviously forbidden”—such as going to restaurants on Sabbath. But this only proves the point. *It's exactly when you see a Scriptural question as black and white that you cannot tolerate others who do not see it like you do!* To you, a person who goes to a restaurant on Sabbath can have no scriptural defense for that position and is only “refusing to repent and rejecting the authority of Scripture.” Thus how could you welcome their presence in your Sabbath-keeping group if you view them as in sin?

Meanwhile, the person who sees no evil in going to a restaurant occasionally on Sabbath can give you ample reasoning on why Torah does not forbid this and how Nehemiah's decision must therefore be based on other principles (such as buying food at the market being part of one's work for sustaining himself during the week, etc.). Both parties think they alone are right and thus are divided on how exactly to keep Sabbath. Neither can prove to the other beyond any shadow of a doubt that they are wrong. Nor can they understand how anyone can see things any differently than they do.

The Problem of Not Seeing the Problem

Complicating matters further, then, is this common issue of many not even *noticing* that the Bible can be understood differently than how they personally understand it. For example, we've all heard someone arguing for their view on what the Bible says because it is “the clear teaching of the Bible” or that “the Bible is very clear on this point.” What a funny statement to the person standing right in front of them to whom it's as clear as mud. Of course, if the Bible's teachings were so clear then there would not be such regular disagreement over them. No wonder we have

the division we do with each one thinking that they see the “clear” teaching of the Bible (and apparently everyone who does not is just mentally deficient?). But when someone does not even realize that others can read the same text and reasonably come to a contrary understanding, their patience and tolerance for different views will be severely strained. It tends to get ugly sooner or later.

One time I posted on my website an article proposing that taking the Mark of the Beast was not the “one-way ticket to hell” that it is often understood to be in Christendom, but scripturally could be repented of—assuming you survive the seven bowls of wrath that you are left behind to endure. Now, normally I get a steady stream of appreciative and complimentary emails to my site and an angry or abusive email only once in a blue moon. But after posting this article I had the equivalent a year’s supply of such emails in one week! I was called a “false teacher,” a “false prophet”, and numerous times told to “repent” because I was “joining the Antichrist.” Yet nowhere did I suggest taking the Mark of the Beast was a good idea as the Antichrist will, but you would think that I did judging from the reaction. This is how ugly it can get sometimes if you hold and express a contrary view on a verse that everyone else assumes is very clearly saying something else.

If having read this chapter the reader has no idea what I’m talking about, believing like some that the Bible is mostly clear “on the things that matter” then there’s probably nothing I can add to change that. I would, however, suggest that the you try going to Google or Yahoo groups and find an active Bible discussion group. Proceed to tell people what you see as the clear teachings of the Bible and watch the reactions and engage them in discussion. If you do this for a few weeks you will no doubt make some amazing discoveries about how differently others can understand the Bible than yourself.

Obviously this situation is not a simple problem, easily solved. As things are today, there will always be some question of application of the Bible that cannot be agreed upon. Something is missing and in the next chapters we’ll figure out what that is, and what it is *not*.

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The other side of the coin is that there may be others out there who realize the great expense of what I am doing and you might like to join with me and sponsor someone who cannot afford the research.

In either case, we are certainly willing to work with you and consider your situation. Please feel free to contact me at Tim@EscapeAllTheseThings.com and explain your circumstances.

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