

## Seven Continents, Too Many Churches, One Fix

**MULTIPLE DIVISION.** “The Reformation of the sixteenth century is not a finale, but a movement still in progress. We may look hopefully forward to a higher, deeper and broader Reformation, when God in His overruling wisdom and mercy, by a pentecostal effusion of His Holy Spirit upon all the churches, will reunite what the sin and folly of men have divided. There must and will be, in the fullest sense of Christ’s prophecy, ‘one flock, one Shepherd’.” These are the words of historian Philip Schaff (d. 1893), writing about the “unhappy divisions of Christendom.” (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, pp. 7-8)

Roger Williams (d. 1683), only months after he began the first Baptist church in America, abandoned it and all existing church organizations, “longing for a true Church of God, but unable to find one on the face of the whole earth. He conceived ‘that the apostasy of the Antichrist had so far corrupted all that there can be no recovery out of that apostasy till Christ send forth new apostles to plant churches anew’.” (*The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, p. 851)

Both of these statements reflect a sad state of affairs, there being so many divisions within “Christendom.” And it is sad! After all, Jesus Himself prayed that His people “all be one” (John 17:21). Likewise, the apostle Paul wrote that Christians should all “agree” —literally “speak the same thing” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

**ONE SOLUTION.** Did you notice that two different fixes were anticipated from Mr. Schaff and Mr. Williams: “a pentecostal effusion of His Holy Spirit” and “send forth new apostles.” I suppose if you read everything everyone ever wrote on the subject, you could multiply

suggested remedies forever. With this in mind, consider very carefully these words the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Also, in the very passage that Jesus prayed all Christians be one, He said “Sanctify them in truth; Your word is truth,” and “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one” (John 17:17, 20-21). **The point is, why should we expect a “pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit” (etc.) when God has already given us all we need to fix the mess we are in —His word?!**

Interestingly enough, several Reformers understood this, at least to a degree. For example, John Calvin (d. 1564) said, “The principle from which Paul derives unity is, that there is ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,’ who hath called us into one hope (Eph. 4:4–6). Therefore, we are one body and one spirit, as is here enjoined, if we adhere to God only, i.e. be bound to each other by the tie of faith. We ought, moreover, to remember what is said in another passage, ‘that faith cometh by the word of God.’ Let it, therefore, be a fixed point, that a holy unity exists amongst us, when, consenting in pure doctrine, we are united in Christ alone.” Calvin hit the nail on the head! William Chillingworth (d. 1644) said, “The Bible, I say, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.” Sounds like Jesus and Paul! Thomas Campbell (d. 1854, and actually of the Restoration Movement) said, “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent,

(continued on back...)

we are silent.”

**RIGHTLY DIVIDING.** In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul wrote, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (KJV). Thankfully, also contained within the Word are demonstrations of how to use it properly. For example, consider the discussion recorded in Acts 15, regarding whether Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved: **How did the apostles figure out what God wanted?** In addition to ➔**EXPLICIT COMMANDS** (obviously)...

➔ **They considered EXAMPLES:** “After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, ‘Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.’ All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God

had done through them among the Gentiles.” (Verses 7-12.)

- ➔ **They considered *NECESSARY IMPLICATIONS*** (*inescapable* “If...then”s, *inescapable* “Therefore”s): “Now therefore why do you put God to the test....” (Verse 10, see also verse 19.)
- ➔ **They considered STATEMENTS:** “After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, ‘...With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, “After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore it, So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,” Says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.” (Verses 13-18.)
- ➔ Note well they also understood that an explicit “Thou shalt not” is not necessary to prohibit something: “...we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction...” (verse 24). (In the absence of an explicit, positive command, the Judaizing teachers should have refrained!)

Now, if Christians would just be consistent...

If you would like to discuss this or any other spiritual topic, let us know (see below)!

By L. Tosti

### ***The Indian River Church of Christ***

We meet in the Shopping Center at 2 South Main Street in Philadelphia NY.

We assemble Sunday mornings at 10 for Bible study and at 11 for worship.

We also assemble Thursday evenings at 7:15 for Bible study.

Our website is [www.indianriverchurchofchrist.com](http://www.indianriverchurchofchrist.com).

Our phone number is (315) 629-4155