

## Concerning Religious Division and the Church

It's often difficult to figure out which way to go when discussing religious doctrines, and/or practices in a public setting without a starting point. If I recall, correctly, you are having some reservations concerning the "Cowboy Church" and I would assume it has to do with doctrine and practice. I know nothing about the "Cowboy Church" (having searched the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation it seems to be missing). In the scriptures, that which brought people with a "like precious faith" together was the fact that they were "in Christ" (not based upon their profession, and/or mode of transportation). <grin>

I mentioned there are over 38,000 Christian denominations. I missed it, a tab-bit. According to [How Many Denominations Of Christianity Are There In 2024? - Christian Website](#) "there are approximately 45,000 different Christian denominations worldwide as of 2024." The article also affirms: "Yet all still trace their roots back to the original unified church founded nearly 2,000 years ago."

My thought process is relatively simple: since "*There* is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6), and since "God is not *a God* of confusion, but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33), somewhere along the way there has been a great deal of grafting, in order to have 45,000 divisions, and "still trace their roots back to the original unified church."

The apostle Paul condemned denominationalism, saying, "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name." (1 Corinthians 1:10-15). In the scriptures, the "church" is referred to as "church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2); the "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16); or, the church in a certain location, i.e., "the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thessalonians 1:1).

With 45,000 "denominations," it would be foolish to think that 45,000 denominations could be thrown into a cauldron, given a good stir, and come out "with different beliefs, practices, and interpretations of scripture" all of which claiming to "trace their roots back to the original unified church" (ibid).

So, what is an individual to do? How can an individual determine which path to follow? Here's a couple of thoughts to ponder: the Apostle Paul, as he was led by inspiration, said,

- 1) "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" the "we" are the apostles (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- 2) Paul told the brethren in Ephesus, "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)" (Ephesians 3:3-4).
- 3) Paul instructed the brethren in Rome, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2).
- 4) "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 Jn. 4:1).
- 5) When Paul taught in Berea, he said, "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).
- 6) When Paul was instructing Timothy, he told him, "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If it is NOT in scriptures, it is NOT "unto all good works."

Paul warned the Corinthians "For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

So, what should a "minister of righteousness" do? "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

There is no “earthly” head over the church.

Ephesians 1:21-22

“he put all things in subjection under his (*Christ*) feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church”

Colossians 1:18

“ And he (*Christ*) is the head of the body, the church”

Organization of the local church

1 Corinthians 11:18

“ when ye come together in the church”

- 1) 1 Peter 5:1-3 – Consists of Elders that “Tend the Flock of God which is among you.”
- 2) Acts 20:17 – A plurality in number, and referred to as:
  - a. Acts 20:17 - “elders”
  - b. Acts 20:28 - “bishops”
  - c. Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2-4 – the pastor is literally a “a *shepherd*.” The function of a shepherd is to feed/tend the flock, and emphasized by the application of the “chief Shepherd.
  - d. 1 Timothy 4:14 – Presbytery “the order of elders”
  - e. All four terms apply to a plurality of men in one office.
- 3) Must meet certain qualifications:
  - a. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 – office of a bishop: “The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach; no brawler, no striker; but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money; one that ruleth well his own house, having *his* children in subjection with all gravity; (but if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) not a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have good testimony from them that are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”
  - b. Titus 1:5-9 – appoint elders (*ibid*)
- 4) Deacons:
  - a. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 – Office of a deacon
  - b. Philippians 1:1 – “to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”

## What You Can Expect to Find Behind the Door

1. There is a pattern to be followed.
  - a. 2 Timothy 1:13 – “Pattern of sound words”, i.e., healthful teaching
  - b. 2 Timothy 2:15 – “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” i.e., “to make a straight cut.”
2. No Creeds: The Bible, no more, no less.
3. Prayer: Examples
  - a. Hebrews 13:18-19 – “Pray for us”
  - b. 1 Thessalonians 5:25 – “Pray for us”
  - c. 1 Corinthians 14:15 – “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also”
4. Singing: For the purpose of teaching and giving thanks
  - a. Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.”
  - b. Ephesians 5:19-20 – “speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”
  - c. Vocal: Acappela
5. Teaching: In an orderly fashion
  - a. Acts 20:20 – “teaching you publicly”
  - b. 1 Corinthians 14:19 – “in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others”
  - c. 1 Corinthians 14:26 – “Let all things be done unto edifying”
  - d. 1 Corinthians 14:31 – “that all may learn, and all my be exhorted”
  - e. 1 Corinthians 14:33 – “ for God is not *a God* of confusion, but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints”
  - f. 1 Corinthians 14:40 – “But let all things be done decently and in order.
  - g. Hebrews 10:24-25 – “and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but **exhorting one another**; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh. ”
6. Partaking of the **Lord’s Supper**:
  - a. Acts 20:7 – On the first day of every week.
  - b. Luke 22:7-8 – Unleavened bread
  - c. Matthew 26:27-29 – Fruit of the vine
  - d. 1 Corinthians 11:20, 23-29 – For all, in remembrance of Lord until He comes.

## **Addendum**

- 1) “The General Conference” of the United Methodist Church “which serves as the main legislative body and is the only entity that speaks officially for the church.”
- 2) Nazarene Church: “the General Board is a globally representative leadership body, created in the 1940s to unify and coordinate the denomination’s ministries. It has 52 members (lay and clergy), elected every four years, and plays a central role in guiding the church’s mission and administration between General Assemblies” (nazarene.org).
- 3) Southern Baptist Convention: “ Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, in General Assembly met, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same. That from and after the passing of this act, That William B. Johnson, Wilson Lumpkin, James B. Taylor, A. Docrey, R. B. C. Howell and others, their associates and successors, be and they are hereby incorporated and made a body politic by the name and style of the Southern Baptist Convention, with authority to receive, hold, possess, retain, and dispose of property, either real or personal, to sue and be sued, and to make all bylaws, rules, and regulations necessary to the transaction of their business, not inconsistent with the laws of this State or of the United States – said corporation being created for the purpose of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of Christians, for the propagation of the gospel, any law, usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding” (sbc.net).
- 4) Assembly of God: “ Board of Directors. The Executive Presbytery shall constitute the Board of Directors of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, performing such functions as are usual and customary for a board of directors. Executive Presbytery and Board of Directors shall be interchangeable terms” (ag.org).

There are numerous “churches” that fall under the umbrella of Major Denominations.” As of this writing the “Cowboy Church” under consideration is associated with the Nazarene Church.

It should also be noted that the church that belongs to Christ is neither Catholic nor Protestant. “Protestantism, Christian religious movement that began in northern Europe in the early 16th century as a reaction to medieval Roman Catholic doctrines and practices. Along with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism became one of three major forces in Christianity.”

Here is how it came about:

