

VI.6. Lambs to Rams: Pre-denominational/Unity

Dan 2:44 And in the days of these kings (*Caesars*) shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

It was during the expansion of the Roman Empire that God set up a kingdom on earth that, unlike all others, is a spiritual kingdom (*Jn 18:36*) which is exalted above all empires that have ever existed or ever will exist (*Mal 4:1-2*). The Head of this kingdom (*the church*) is Christ with no earthly counterpart as mere denominations may imply. God adds citizens to this kingdom (*Col 1:13*) who have been obedient to His will and her growth continues to this day (*Heb 12:28; Rev 7:9*).

Every kingdom has a beginning and the church is no exception. Jesus told Peter that He would build **His church** (*at that time yet future*), meaning that there would only be **one** entity that would bear the authority and recognition as belonging to Him (*its Founder*) and not several smaller groups that together would equal His bride (*Rev 21:2*).

Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock (*Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ*) I **will build My church** (*Gk.1577- a calling out [1 Pet 2:9]*); and the gates of hell (*Gk.86- Hades*) shall not prevail against it. (*Emp. added*)

What Jesus told Peter about the foundation of the church was that she could not stand were it not for Jesus actually being the prophesied Messiah Who came and gave "His life a ransom for many" (*Mat 20:28*). His resurrection was proof that the Hadean realm could not keep Him from constructing His kingdom. Therefore, Peter was not the foundation of the church but his confession gave witness to the true Foundation, Abraham's seed "which is Christ" (*Gal 3:16*). At the time Jesus questioned His disciples concerning what they were told about Who He was, His church hadn't been built. He had to return to

Heaven in order to send her to the earth “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (*Act 2:1*) for people to become part of it through obedience.

And there’s no mention made of a physical structure built by men out of wood, brick or stone nor were there any such edifices in the first century so the word “church” was referring to the group of people who were “called out” of the world. The structure we come together in is not the “church” but the “church building”. And there is no mention of Unitarian Universalists, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Lutherans, Evangelicals, Catholics, Protestants, Presbyterians or other denominational names in the Bible.

2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial (*bel-ee'-al*)? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple (*church*) of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

We are to call Bible things by Bible names.

Isa 6:22 ...a **new name**, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. (*Emp. added*)

Act 11:26 ... And the disciples were **called Christians** first in Antioch. (*Emp. added*)

But with Greek philosophy along with “various interpretations of its relationship to Judaism” Christianity was no longer “being understood and defended upon the basis of miracle,

revelation and inspiration, it was watered down with human rationalism”.

F.W. Mattox: “The Eternal Kingdom” (pg. 107)

Organization

Act 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all **the flock**, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**, to **feed** the church of God (*Gk.2316- Deity*), which He hath purchased with His (*Christ's*) own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore **watch**, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (*Emp. added*)

Elders (*Gk.4245- Christian “presbyter”*), bishops (*Gk.1985- superintendent: -overseer*) and shepherds (*Gk.4166- a shepherd: -pastor*) in the church all refer to the same office but with reference to differing roles played by these same individuals. Once these roles were differentiated by mere humans the “bishop” became the head of the rest which in time led to the bishop of Rome evolving into the Pope (*papa*) over the Roman Catholic (*universal*) church.

“Leo thus became the first pope.” (440 AD) “Gregory I, who was also given the title “the Great”, ruled from 590 to 604. At the close of his reign the theory of the primacy of Peter and the Roman bishop as his successor and universal head of the church was definitely established”.

F.W. Mattox: “The Eternal Kingdom” (pg. 140)

Eventually within the Roman Catholic Church rebellion began out of disagreement to the inherent practices given to the priesthood. The Catholic priests were mostly landlords that became the voice of scripture even though they no longer had to study it as a prerequisite for the position. Since all the services were rendered in Latin, those who couldn't understand were

treated with contempt “because the people could not tell the difference”. In 1511 when Martin Luther made a trip to Rome he also witnessed the “sale of indulgences” (*payments were made to the Catholic Church to receive, in advance, limited atonement for sins*) which adherents could purchase for their own future transgressions and the transgressions of lost loved ones. (*Salesmen received 10% of those sales and payments funded the coffers of the church in Rome.*) On October 31, 1517 Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenburg meeting house with the offer to debate anyone who opposed him on this.

F.W. Mattox: “The Eternal Kingdom” (*pgs. 220, 241, 244-245, 292*)

This brought about the beginning of the Reformation Movement, not to restore the original primitive church but to reform what it had become under the papacy at Rome. At this point there were only the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. The multitudes of denominations that received their genesis from this reformation have multiplied, and continue to do so even to today.

Non-denominational

Rom 16:16 Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

“The sign in front of the meeting place of the church of Christ in Mount Holly Springs, Pennsylvania that was placed there by Charles Yana II, the local minister, and reads: CHURCH OF CHRIST- Pre-denominational. (*May 16, 2023*)

“His sign expresses the truth that the church Jesus established was built before men started denominational churches. Churches that have used denominational names in order to set them apart from other churches have denominated themselves because they differ from each other in doctrine, and/or organization, and practice.

“In recent years churches that accept people of all creeds call themselves non-denominational because they no longer embrace a specific denominational creed but accept people of all creeds. They open their doors to almost all people with differing beliefs who do not want to be identified with any denomination.

“For this reason the term ‘non-denominational’ does not identify churches of Christ as being different than these groups and thus does not best communicate our goal.

“The goal of the churches of Christ is to follow Jesus’ teaching which preceded the teaching that has created the many denominations of today. In order to do this, we accept only the teaching that predates the teaching of denominations.

“In order to communicate this effort, we should express it by letting the world know that we are not simply non-denominational but pre-denominational. Since non-denominational has come to mean an amalgamation of doctrinal beliefs, the term pre-denominational might better communicate our plea to return to the simple New Testament teaching of Jesus.”

Owen D. Olbricht: “Non-Denominational/Pre-denominational”
(The complete article can be viewed at...) The Gospel Gleaner
www.gospelgleaner.com

Unity

1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by 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 **perfectly joined together** in the **same mind** and in the **same judgment**. 11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 **Is Christ divided?** was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (*Emp. added*)

There is a need for the unity which Christ prayed for before His crucifixion (*Jn 17:21*). The oneness existing between Father and Son can never be accomplished outside of truth but should be the goal for every human who has the intellect and desire to search for truth in all things spiritual. To strive for such a unity would only be accomplished when “self” is replaced with humility and personal interpretation with a “what saith the Lord” attitude.

Persecution is to be expected from without when we continue to preach the truth but, the one place discord should never originate is from within the church (*Pro 6:19*). Such will always cause disruption of true fellowship and is detrimental to the eagerness of those who teach, preach and evangelize to continue to do so. Such is a discouragement that displays a lack of love for the body as a whole and can therefore slow or even stop it from reaching out to the lost. When even one of our brethren is discouraged it has a snowball’s effect on the work of rest of the church.

Eph 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with (*Gk.430- put up with*) one another in love, 3 eager (*Gk.4704- to make an effort, to be earnest*) to maintain the unity (*Gk.1775- oneness*) of the Spirit in the bond (*Gk.4886- a joint tie, that is, ligament, [figuratively] uniting principle*) of peace.

To be “eager” as this verse promotes is the same as in 2 Tim 2:15, where we are to “do [our] best” (*Gk.4704*) as we “present [ourselves] to God as one approved”. How we present ourselves to God can be therefore understood as how eager we are to “maintain the unity”. Both are mandated and carry the weight of a Biblical command. “Bond” here in one of the Greek glosses refers to what the purpose of a ligament is. A ligament is “a band of tissue connecting bones or holding organs in place” (*Webster*). That “oneness” “of the Spirit” can only be accomplished when there is a peace within the church that

holds each part of the body together. And Paul's admonition to the Corinthian brethren came about because there were those among them that were attempting to weaken, or even sever, that "bond of peace".

1Co 11:18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you **in order that** those who are genuine among you may be recognized. (*Emp. added*)

"Such is human nature, such are the corrupt passions of men, the propensity to ambition and strife, that they are to be expected, and they serve the purpose of showing who are, and who are not, the true friends of God."

Albert Barnes

Obviously we can't allow truth to suffer at the hand of our love for the lost. Both go hand in hand. If we love people we're not to lie to people. But in the same token we're not to be so blunt about it either.

Eph 4:14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: 16 From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

VI.6. Questions

1. Who were the kings in power when the church was established? a) the Popes; b) the Roman Caesars; c) the British Monarchs.
2. Upon what foundation is the church built? a) Jesus as the Messiah; b) Peter as the first Pope; c) bricks and mortar.
3. On what day did the kingdom Daniel spoke of come into existence? a) on Sunday; b) AD 70; c) Pentecost.
4. When did the scriptural organization of the church change? a) it didn't; b) when man designated a different status between elder, bishop and shepherd; c) neither a nor b.
5. What provoked Martin Luther to nail his 95 theses to the door at Wittenberg? a) when the doctrine of Purgatory was first taught; b) when the Pope claimed infallibility; c) the sale of indulgences.
6. What was Martin Luther's goal for the Roman Catholic Church? a) to reform what it had become under the papacy of Rome; b) to restore it to the apostolic age; c) to return it to its roots under the primitive church.
7. What does the term "non-denominational" refer to? a) the true church; b) an amalgamation of doctrinal beliefs; c) what the Bible refers to as the primitive church.
8. Why must factions arise in the church? a) it is a false idea that factions must arise; b) so that the genuine can be recognized; c) it is God's will.