

# The Way The Truth and The Life

by

Phillip Patton

A quick look around the world with a religious filter will expose a plethora of groups that call themselves religious bodies. A study of the annals of history will educate one to the fact that many of these did not exist until the last few hundred years. The question, then, arises "how can I trust what is right?" When Jesus prayed the night before His crucifixion He prayed for unity from the very outset. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1). Unity was evident within the godhead as the Master Teacher sought to fulfill all. He also prayed for the unity of His disciples, "And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them" (John 17:10). Jesus not only prayed for the unity His disciples but extended that desire of unity to everyone. "Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). The appeal for unity was, and is, to be all inclusive. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

Since it is the case that God desires unity through Christ in His body the next question to ponder is, "why are there so many religious ideas and systems of belief amongst those who call themselves Christian?" The answer is quite complex when considering the origin of every sect/denomination. The problem dwells in the fact that Christ prayed for unity, not diversity. This fact is attested to in apostolic writings illustrating to us today that this is not a new problem. When writing to the brethren in Corinth, Paul wrote to correct this problem of division. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, (Emph. Mine) and that there be no divisions among you; (Emph. Mine) but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul" (1 Cor. 1:10-13)? Yet, when one gazes across the land he sees the epitome of division. Everyone wants to have their own creed, their own doctrine, etc... As already stated, this is not a new problem. A quick look at the "T" epistles (1Thessalonians-Titus) will give one the proof needed to see that this is

not a modern "only" problem. The Thessalonian brethren were being troubled by factions of the resurrection. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1Ths 4:13-14). Teachers of division did not stop just because Paul wrote of their coming for he had to exhort the same brethren in latter epistle "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (2Th. 2:2). The simple resolution then, and today, is to follow the commands already given, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal 1:6-10).

With the knowledge that teachers of division were alive and well in the first century why is there such surprise that they are alive and well today? So the final question to ask of this inquiry is, "Where do we find unity?" The answer to this query is not complex at all, yet, so many come up completely short of the goal of unity. Why, one might ask. Because of the desire to hang on to man made ordinances. This is no different than the Jews in the first century who lived by tradition and whom the Lord condemned. "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye" (Mark 7:9, 13). How many today would the Master turn to and say, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition" (Matt 15:3)? Holding on to man made creeds, articles of faith, or the like will cause some to "depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1Tim 4:1). Paul was very clear in instructing the Ephesians that there is only ONE way, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:3-6). How, then, does one obtain this "one?" This is available through

"righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," (Rom 5:21). The one with the desire to become righteous, justified, will diligently search to find the source of righteousness, which is, the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17). Adam opened the door for sin to reign (Rom 5:12) of which the wages are death (Rom 6:23). So what is the escape of the "ONE" way? Through obedient faith, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5, 16:26). Paul using "faith" here to speak of the whole Gospel system of faith tells all men in every generation from that point onward that obedience to Gospel is the "ONE" way. So many want to say "all you have to do is believe" without considering what "belief" actually means. Belief means lovingly and trustingly obeying God in everything He said to do. This is the reason that Abraham (Rom 4) is used as the example of obedient faith. Contrary to popular thought, Abraham was not a Jew. The Jews were the Israelites who did not obtain that name until after Jacob as his name was changed to Israel and the 12 tribes of Israel descended from him into the nation of Israel. What did Abraham do? He believed God. What did that belief make him do? It made him trust that God would do what He said if he would only do his part. He was told to get up and get out of his homeland (Gen 12), which he did. His obedience was counted unto him for righteousness looking toward the cross from the promise made to him (Gen 12:3). How does all this apply to the "one" way? "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom 8:1). The "one" body is in Christ (Rom 12:5). So the question is how does one get into Christ? "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:23-29). The Holy Writ is very clear as to the "ONE" way of entry into Christ and the "ONE" way of truth. Truth is found in the word of God not the word of men. "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth" (John 17:17). If truth is of God's word, and man's word is tied to tradition, then creeds, articles of faith, etc...written and upheld by men, are tradition and void of truth. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col

2:8). "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). The Scriptures testify to the fact that the traditions of men are dangerous and to be avoided. Therefore, unity can only be found in the "ONE." Where, then, is the "ONE." "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body (Emph. Mine)" (Eph 5:23). "And he is the head of the body, the church: (Emph. Mine) who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). Since His body is the church each member makes up the "ONE" body. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1Cor 12:12-14). The members (those who have believed in obedience) make up the body, the body is the church of which Christ is the head, does it not make sense then that the body is the body of Christ? If the body of Christ is the church, then the church must be the church of Christ (Rom 16:16).

The mere word "denomination" denotes a division. When speaking of money even a child understands that pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters are "divisions" of a dollar. If this is true, and no doubt it is, why is it so difficult to understand that religious division, denominationalism, is sin. Many people want to say that the church of Christ is just another denomination. Dear reader, this could not be farther from the truth. "Church of Christ" is not a name. It is a designation that tells everyone that this body of believers, members of the church, belong to Christ and no other. There is no man made creed or article of faith used in the "ONE" body. A true follower of Christ, Christian, will follow Christ and His word (John 17:17). The Lord's church cannot be "joined" or have one "voted" into the membership but rather upon obedience to the Gospel one is "added" by the Lord (Acts 2:47). When giving the "great commission" the Master said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). Many factions exist that attempt to teach the Bible, but sadly, many fall short. The Lord's church will call Bible things by Bible names, speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent. This, dear friend, is the "ONE" way. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).