

ZAIN. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. (Psa 119:49)

Today we are going to continue our exploration of so-called Christian “denominations”. As a reminder, the fundamental point of this series of discussions is that the Holy Ghost has been tasked with preserving and aiding the church – Christ’s Bride – until the return of our King. He has not failed in that task, does not need human intervention to accomplish that task, and as a member of the Triune God cannot err in His approach to the task.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ from its beginning did not operate with diverse beliefs, methods of worship or man-made hierarchies. Yet, that is precisely what you find across all of these false denominations. They present false Christs as a matter of course, throughout their doctrine, practices and ministries.

It is important for those who carry the hope of eternal life to remember that this confusion and presentation of false Christs is to be expected. We are warned of it expressly by our King

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Mat 24:24)

I increasingly believe that this sowing of confusion by the enemy, making Christ appear as soft, weak and malleable, without true authority, not a judge or avenger, being instead subservient to the fickle wills of men, is the precursor to these false Christs appearing and popping up around us.

The hope of Christ’s people is dependent upon the steadfast immutability of God which is not represented by the Christs these denominations present.

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (Mal 3:6)

If the sons of Jacob are dependent upon the unchangeableness of God to preserve them, how much more does the grafted branch need His steadfast and unmovable nature to keep us from being deceived and destroyed?

Yet, in this confused false Christianity, we don’t see one God being worshiped, one Christ being praised and glorified. We see vastly different representations, different doctrines, administrations, etc. That cannot possibly be the church of God

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” (1Co 14:33)

This isn't about denigrating or being contentious with these denominations for the sake of forensic battle; this is about finding clarity for ourselves and insuring we maintain our adherence to the standards as we see them laid out in Scripture. We are subject to being deceived and our Master has told us to watch, and I see it as an important part of watching to know who our fellow servants actually are

“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” (Luk 21:36)

We must watch and make note of where truth shines out of darkness, and not be sucked into the darkness that surrounds us. To keep ourselves separate requires us to know what it is we are being separate from.

As we look at today's denominations, I think one thing that will fall on you is that there is little that truly differentiates them fundamentally from their original source – the Catholic whore. If your denomination can't easily be shown as separate from Belial and darkness, shouldn't that be seen as a problem?

First, we will examine the Methodists.

Methodism

The Methodist church is a source of great evil especially in this country. It is very easy to see this when you drive through America's cities and towns and see some of the biggest and most prominent pride flags hanging outside Methodist churches. These are churches who claim to believe in and follow Christ. Those things cannot exist together.

It's not hard to see why this is the case when you consider their beginnings. The Methodist church was not intentionally "founded" as much as it grew kind of like a bubble out of the morass of the Church of England. John and Charles Wesley grew up in Anglicanism and while at Oxford founded what they called the "Holy Club". In the club, they followed a very structured approach to their Bible study and devotions, which earned them what was intended as a derogatory nickname of "Methodists".

The initial goal of the Wesleys was to reform the Anglican church from within, getting away from the elitism that had come to permeate it by the 1700s and bring the masses into the pews. Anglicanism had become, much like the Episcopal church in this country, a "religion" of the elite. It was a club for the privileged wealthy to have their consciences salved for the way they treated their fellow men.

The Wesleys spent a lot of time in workhouses, prisons and street preaching – all things the preachers of the Church of England would not do. The split from the church of England built over years with many ministers following the Wesleys' methodical approach, until in 1784 things came to a head when the bishop of London refused to

appoint a Methodist-leaning minister in the United States. John Wesley basically broke off and took matters into his own hands, appointing leaders across the US as “superintendents” and into other roles in a new hierarchy. In 1795, four years after John Wesley's death, the Methodist church fully broke away from the church of England and became a separate entity. It almost immediately fractured into multiple sub-groups and splinter sects with the Methodist New Connexion, Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, and the United Methodist Free Churches to name a few. Over the course of American history, there have been splits and consolidations so that there are still a large number of groups calling themselves Methodist, such as the African Methodist Episcopal (with its own set of sub-groups). In many ways it is very similar to the orders and sects of Catholicism without some of its rigidity. The differences amongst the groups are all but non-existent in reality. They all believe the same Arminian heresy (from methodist.org):

Jesus preached the Gospel - the good news of the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' death on the cross, and his resurrection, Christians believe that God has broken the power of all that is evil, in the world and in ourselves. If we accept forgiveness and liberation, and are willing to be open to the Holy Spirit, God can enable us to resist evil and to live life to the full.

Yes, God needs you to accept forgiveness and liberation, despite this clear truth:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:” (Joh 10:27)

There's no interim step here, that they “decide whether to accept my invitation and if they decline I don't really mind”. This isn't optional. Christ is speaking in fact – they hear my voice, and because I know them they follow me.

Like most denominations, Methodists are not content with God's word, as you see from their “quadrilateral” of elements that drive their beliefs:

Scripture

We seek to discover the word of God through reading the Bible. There are different understandings among Methodists about the Bible's authority in our lives. We need to use resources like different Bible translations, commentaries and Bible reading notes.

Tradition

This is the wisdom and creativity of Christians over time and across the world. It includes inspirational material like hymns, songs, prayers, poetry, Christian art and devotional books,. There are also formally agreed teachings like the creeds, the content of the catechism, and statements and reports from the Methodist Conference.

Reason

We are called to love God with our minds as well as with our hearts. To the best of our ability we need to think things through in the light of reason. This means becoming aware of different points of view, and using our own critical thinking to make sense of God's world.

Experience

Methodism particularly stresses the importance of our own experience of God's grace working in our lives. We gain wisdom and maturity from life experience, especially when we pray and reflect about our story with other Christians.

All of this springs directly from the Wesley brothers, who spent their time in their “Holy Club” finding excuses, arguments and ways to refute the plain truth of Scripture. They did so while rejecting the plain exhortations of fellow “Holy Club” member George Whitefield to reject the heresy of free-will and Arminianism for the truth of predestination and election. They had the truth in their midst and fought it.

Everything from these two men, including the 6,000 plus hymns Charles Wesley wrote, is poisoned with free-will and heresy. Springing from the Church of England without repudiating it for its own falsehood led them down a path of further error, and that error has simply compounded, split and compounded again through all the different segments of the Methodist church, which has no Christianity in it.

Lutheranism

It would be easy to think of Lutheranism as a legitimate expression of Christian worship if you believe it has anything to do with Martin Luther's teachings or what he believed. Don't make any mistake – neither the early nor the modern Lutheran church have anything to do with what Luther believed or taught.

Remember that Luther didn't set out to form a church. He was a Catholic friar by education and following. In 1517, he decided that he'd had enough of the corrupt behavior of the Pope, the tipping point issue being the selling of indulgences. This is a Catholic doctrine that is still considered to be active (though supposedly modified). When the idea of purgatory took hold in the 11th and 12th century, the companion idea of penance, or the working off of sin, simultaneously took hold. Indulgences gave you the means to pay down that penance debt. So, Catholics had basically created the ability for a sinner to work or pay their way out of hell.

The Catholic doctrine of penance requires temporal punishment as payment for sins. With indulgences being put into motion, money quickly came into play as a substitute for other types of punishment. This idea expanded to a person being able to pay a penance not only for themselves but for others as well – not to buy forgiveness mind you, oh no, but to lessen the amount of time they spent in Purgatory frying off their

sins. Multiple Popes leveraged the system to create a significant source of revenue, paying for things like St. Peter's Basilica in what is now Vatican City through indulgence purchases.

Luther objected to this obvious corruption and originally only sought to call out the error of this false doctrine for debate, hoping that the church might be reformed from this sinful approach to dealing with people. This call to debate was contained in Luther's "95 Theses" which he published in 1517. This is commonly called the beginning of The Reformation and the start of "Protestant" religions which were "protesting" various points of Catholicism.

While many like to hold Luther up as some hero and bastion of the Gospel Church in our age, if you actually read his points of argument, he had no intention of putting off Catholicism. He clearly held the Pope and the priesthood as an appropriate approach to Christian worship and leadership thinking they could be reformed with a few tweaks. His view didn't change until later in his life, and if you read his writings thoroughly, I'm not sure he ever fully cast off the shackles of that false system. He did, however, write many things that are doctrinally accurate, including his "*De Servo Arbitrio*"; in English, "*On Un-Free Will*" or more commonly "*Bondage of the Will*", one of the greatest written works outside Scripture itself for debunking free will-ism.

For his efforts at sparking discussion with an eye on reform, Luther and a small group of followers were excommunicated from the Catholic church and declared criminals by Charles V.

None of this history and understanding of the truth that Luther held (where he held it) came into play in the formation of the Lutheran church. While it is true that after being excommunicated, Luther met with different groups of people and continued preaching against Catholic heresy, he wasn't establishing a counter religious organization, and the organization that formed around his initial teachings quickly left off the beliefs in predestination and election that Luther taught.

There is no real vestige of Luther in the Lutheran church, in other words. There is lip service to it, they claim that the Bible is their only source of truth (their "Sola Scriptura" doctrine) – but they turn right around and declare the "Book of Concord" as "authoritative"; the book contains nothing but the works of men (ten creeds, Luther's "Greater Catechism" and other writings). Either Scripture is solely authoritative, or it isn't, so how is it that another book can be authoritative?

Lutherans practice infant baptism, which Luther argued was fine in one of the weirdest arguments I've maybe ever heard. This is from his "Great Catechism"

"That the Baptism of infants is pleasing to Christ is sufficiently proved from His own work, namely, that God sanctifies many of them who have been thus baptized, and has given them the Holy Ghost; and that there are yet many even

to-day in whom we perceive that they have the Holy Ghost both because of their doctrine and life...”

I'm not out to negate the good Luther preached, or the work he did in defying the Catholics and bringing a translation of the Bible to the masses, but only point out that he was just another man subject to fault and failure. His doctrine wasn't perfect. Don't put him on a pedestal, and don't think for one second that Lutherans actually follow the teachings of their namesake.

Consider this statement of belief off the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod website as a great example:

“By His suffering and death as the substitute for all people of all time, Jesus purchased and won forgiveness and eternal life for them. Those who hear this Good News and believe it have the eternal life that it offers.”

Luther didn't preach this. If you read *De Servo Arbitrio* you learn less than 50 pages in that he didn't think this. It defies their supposed and stated belief in “salvation by grace alone” – if He is the substitute “for all people of all time”, there is no need for any hearing or believing, He has already saved everyone. Grace isn't dependent upon the recipient doing anything, that's why it is grace, not works. These things don't align.

The Lutheran “church” is a splintered entity. There are many divisions amongst them, the two most prominent being the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. The former ordaining women and homosexuals to their “priesthood”, the latter at least claiming in their doctrinal statements that homosexuality is a sin. The LCMS doesn't allow women preachers but splits some invisible hair in regard to “deaconesses” something not found in Scripture.

The bottom line is that Lutheranism is just another sowing of confusion by the enemy, not Christianity. Despite carrying Luther's name, they are just another group of charlatans claiming to but not actually following Christ.

Presbyterianism

Like with Lutheranism, it is easy to get caught up in the “founders” of the Presbyterian church and think there may be truth and light in it, since John Calvin and John Knox were heavily involved in its beginnings.

Don't get caught up in that. Refer back to what I said about Luther being a man and apply it to Calvin and Knox as well. Perhaps even more so when you consider their whole body of work.

Much like Lutheranism, no one precisely set out to establish a denomination of Christianity called Presbyterianism, and its history is full of influences and influencers more than organizers, with the denomination coming into existence during the

Reformation. Some historians place the beginnings of the Presbyterian church slightly before the Reformation with Huldrych Zwingli and bring Calvin into the picture as more of a second wave. The Presbyterian church really started coming together as followers of John Calvin's anti-Rome "reformed theology" organized around differences they held with Luther and his followers in regard to the Lord's Supper, the meaning and purpose of baptism, predestination, church governance and other points.

Calvin, of course, is possibly the most famous proponent of the doctrines of predestination and election. He held, like Luther, that the Bible was the sole source of truth and authority. He also held a number of beliefs that I don't find to be scriptural at all, including his views on church and state. It is very difficult though to see any tie between what Calvin taught and these Presbyterian churches outside of some words on a website today. The actions of these organizations don't align to Calvin's teachings or the Westminster Confession most claim to be an authoritative "guide" to their beliefs. They certainly don't follow the Bible.

Like most other denominations, the Presbyterians have bifurcated and split many times into sub-denominations. They ordain women and baptize infants, though infant baptism seems to be left up to local denominations to decide their stance. The organization of the Presbyterian church seems on its face to be anti-hierarchical, with their main claim in this regard being that local congregations are governed by "presbyters" or groups of elders alone. The existence of a master organization, which sets doctrine and practice seems to debunk the idea that these are autonomous churches in reality.

As an example of what this master organization sets as policy, I give you this (from the HRC website):

"In 2018, the 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to affirm its commitment to the full welcome, acceptance, and inclusion of transgender people, people who identify as gender non-binary, and people of all gender identities within the full life of the church and the world. It went further to lament 'the ways that the policies and actions of the PC(USA) have caused gifted, faithful, LGBTQIA+ Christians to leave the Presbyterian church so that they could find a more welcoming place to serve, as they have been gifted and called by the Spirit.'"

It is not possible that a Christian church endorses and promotes behavior that Christ has defined as sinful. The Presbyterian church, for whatever words it might put into the air about believing in Christ, does not follow those words with behavior indicative of following Christ. They cannot therefore by definition, be Christian.

Baptists

To put it mildly, the history of the Baptist church is a hot mess. There are those who like James Carroll put forth that the Baptists are the church of Jesus Christ maintained by the Holy Spirit, starting from John the Baptist to today.

There are other historians who hold that the Baptist church rose out of the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century; the term anabaptist meaning to “baptize again” due to their baptizing people who had been baptized Catholic as infants, which was illegal under Catholic rule. There are so-called Baptist churches in Europe today that trace their history back to these early congregations.

The majority of historians, however, consider the Baptist denomination to have begun during the late 16th and early 17th centuries as an outgrowth of the Puritanical movement in England, which sought to purify the church of England from the vestiges of Popery (which they clearly failed at).

Baptists were primarily distinct from other denominations by their being congregational in their governance practices and the requirement of full immersion baptism of confessing adults only. They had no significant hierarchical structure like other denominations (until coming together in the “conventions” found mostly in the United States). Early Baptists were by and large separated into two classifications – General and Particular. The line of demarcation between the two centers on a *general* versus *particular* (or limited) atonement. The Particular Baptists largely aligned themselves with the teachings of Calvin, where General Baptists were more Arminian. This bifurcation makes the argument that churches using the label “Baptist” are tied through succession back to John the Baptist and Christ all the less believable.

Baptist is just another label men have put on false religious practices in a vain attempt to make the idolatrous look holy. There have been Baptist preachers who taught truth, but that doesn’t make the denomination “right”. Taking a label doesn’t bestow a candlestick, the Holy Spirit does that.

Throughout history, Baptists have tended toward a very outspoken rejection of church being joined to state in both England and the US. They have a long history of being abused and persecuted by “churches” who hold the opposing position that religion should take advantage of the power the state provides when joined to it, such as the Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and the Calvinistic Reformed Churches of Geneva. Many Baptists hold that this persecution is the indicator of their righteousness. While it is true (and we point this out frequently) that Christ said

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.” (Luk 21:17)

If you aren’t hated for His name’s sake, i.e., because you are carrying His standard plainly and clearly, but are just generally hated because you are odious, that is no indicator of anything good. Another way to look at it, is that just being a thorn in the side of your local government doesn’t make you the church of Christ. When you’re

busy making allies of presumptuous sinners and refusing to uphold the standards of God, the persecution can't be attributed to your following Christ – since you aren't. Looking at the modern Baptist church and their widespread acceptance of divorce and remarriage, fornication, celebration of pagan Catholic holidays, how they treat the ordinances and statements like the below from the National Baptist Convention make it hard to call Baptists universally Christian. Listen to this:

“We believe that the Scriptures teach that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the Gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by cordial, penitent and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth, but his own determined depravity and voluntary rejection of the Gospel; which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation.”

I'll point out that the Southern Baptists and other Baptist conventions and organizations have similar statements. What need is there for Christ if men must accept anything? His sovereignty and rule is relegated to a mutable wish, not a saving grace that is irresistible and independent of the creature being saved, as Scripture clearly teaches.

Given that there are many Baptist churches that are not part of any of these large-scale governing bodies it is hard to say that all Baptists are heretical non-Christians. But calling yourself a Baptist certainly doesn't make you Christian, and hopefully that is clear.

A Few Words on the Reformation and Great Awakening

Calvin, Knox and Luther were contemporaries during what is frequently termed The Protestant Reformation. This is a title that historians have put on the period of time from 1517 when Luther delivered his “95 Theses” to roughly 1600. It is a window in time when some men were rejecting the greed and power grabbing nature of the Catholic church and writing alternative Bible-based views of God. There is no magic or special view to be had around this era for us, outside of all the things that happened being truly ordained by God. The Lord God didn't suddenly start being worshipped in truth *en masse*. Rejecting Catholicism doesn't equate to being righteous and true.

By God's grace, at this same time, the printing press empowered some of these men to get around the tight restrictions the Catholics imposed on dissemination of information and holding onto the Word with a death grip. Like every technological advance man has made, its value only lies in how men use it to further His glory. In this case, His truth was made more widely known through common language Bible translations and exegetical writings. It doesn't mean the truth was followed.

Christ's church was not and is not dependent upon the work of any men. The New Testament church has continued from the time of the Apostles until now, including through the Dark Ages. Man's tendency to “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom

1:18) doesn't impede God's promises or keep them from being fulfilled. The gates of hell have not prevailed against His church, and just because history books can't precisely trace that continuity doesn't change its existence.

There is no intrinsic value in the men or the works of this period – the best of these works are nothing more than explanations and proper exegesis on God's Word itself. The doctrines these men formulated, espoused or re-framed are not worth the paper they were repeatedly printed on when and where they diverge from Scripture. The same is true for the period known as the "Great Awakening" in America from roughly 1720 – 1740 when the Methodist church was forming, and Jonathan Edwards was preaching hellfire from his pulpit.

There is work that men in these periods of history did – translating the Bible, getting it printed and dispersed widely, interpreting the Word, teaching it to the masses in open rebellion against Catholic heresy, etc. that has value. But like all men and all events of human history, they simply fulfilled God's providential will. Not all the men who are well known as "reformers" or "enlightened" are righteous men – I point you again at the flaming Arminian heresy of the Wesley brothers. Not all the work is worthy of praise. Unrighteous men have done work that glorifies God and serves to benefit His people. I point you to Balaam and the excellent words he spoke – true words, edifying words, words of God's blessing, and yet by all indicators spoken by a flaming heretic.

Vessels. That is how you must view these men and their works. It is how you must view our own works as it relates to this public ministry. We're nothing more than vessels, messengers seeking to deliver a faithful and true message directly from Scripture. There's nothing special about us in that regard, it is God's grace that authors our faith and the Holy Spirit which we pray guides our words, not some special righteousness we've achieved. The same is true for these men of old.

There are other denominations we could look at – Unitarians, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and a plethora of others, and I may still undertake some exploration there if people think it's helpful, but here's the thing – there is so much similarity between these denominations, especially those that sprang out of Catholicism that it starts to feel repetitive. They are different colors of the same cloth essentially. I hope you see these patterns and the fact that we are subject to the same dangers and risks that permeate these false religions. We are not exempt from the pride and hubris that has driven these denominations away from Christ and into self-worship.

We will take the Lord's Supper today, and I bring to your remembrance what Paul has given us on this important ordinance:

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he

had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” (1Co 11:23-29)

As we keep this ordinance, I want to highlight a common theme across the denominations that is a danger for us. It is a simple concept discussed by John in his general epistle:

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1Jn 1:5-7)

The important element of this passage is “...in him is no darkness at all”. If there is no darkness in Him, there can be no darkness in His ambassadors and worshippers. His Bride must be as He is. What I mean by this is not that His followers walk without sin – we know this isn’t the case, otherwise what would His blood be cleansing us from? His Bride must endeavor to be holy as He is holy.

The thing that you see in these denominations is what I believe to be a universal disregard of this need. They tie themselves to presumptuous sins and impenitent sinners under some guise of “mercifulness”, “charity”, “inclusion”, not being “judgmental” or with the catchy little phrase “Jesus ate with publicans and prostitutes” (or some variation thereof) and fellowship the unblemished Lamb and themselves with darkness.

Remember that these denominations claim to be followers of Christ, a part of His Bride, the ultimate expression of fellowship and union with Him. This isn’t some pagan religion like Buddhism or Islam we’re talking about. This is 2.5 billion people claiming to be the followers and disciples of Christ, declaring they have fellowship with him.

If as a congregation, you’re promoting abortion, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, if you’re flippant and careless with the ordinances, allow women preachers or teach doctrines that are not found in His Scripture, you walk in darkness. They tie themselves to it in fact.

This is why defining what a Christian is and is not, why going over these doctrines and their practical application, holding fast to the ordinances as they are laid out in Scripture, not bending with every breeze of man is so, so important. There are risks and dangers for us literally around every corner, dark places that our hearts and minds can take us when we do not hold fast to the standard. We must seek fellowship with Him as He has defined it, not as we would like it to be.

Do you think that these churches or their leaders wake up in the morning thinking that they are pulling a fast one over on the people? Maybe a few of them do, but I have heard many, many people over these decades that were genuinely sincere in their declaration that their denomination was indeed following Christ, that they had fellowship with Him, being totally unable to see that they have no light at all, their pastors and priests having blinded them to the simple truth of His word.

We are not immune to these types of failings. We are just as susceptible to the darkness of the flesh as any other man. Keeping this ordinance strictly so that we do this not only “in remembrance of Him”, but also so that we soberly examine ourselves honestly as to whether we walk in darkness or not is crucial. Judging ourselves that we would not be judged and found wanting is a critical indicator of whether we indeed are part of His Bride. It is one of the things that is critically wanting in these denominations – that judgment, that discernment. It is not enough to say we walk with Him; we must actually do it.

Let us all then remember what Paul also says to the Corinthians here

*“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, **that we should not be condemned with the world.**” (1Co 11:31-32)*