

A Study of the Local Church
Lesson 1 – Attitudes towards Open Study and Resolving Differences
www.aubeacon.com

Introduction: When I first left denominationalism I was shocked to find that there was division among churches of Christ.

- A. When I began to inquire about the division I began to be puzzled by the quick answers other Christians gave to me.
1. In some cases I had a hard time imagining how division could occur in the way it was described to me. (Ex. They won't support our schools!)
 2. I became very concerned when those that described the beliefs of others admitted that they had never tried to talk with the intent of understanding the beliefs of others. (**Prov 18:13**)

Proverbs 18:13 (NKJV) - He who answers a matter before he hears *it*, *It is* folly and shame to him.

3. Having just left denominationalism I had great confidence in the power of God's word to resolve any differences that might divide us. (**Jn 7:17, 17:20-21**)

John 7:17 (NKJV) - If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*.

John 17:20 (NKJV) - "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

- B. I quickly learned that many within churches of Christ had never "made faith their own." (**1 Tim 4:12, 16**)

1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV) - Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

1 Timothy 4:16 (NKJV) - Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

1. Just as I had followed what I was taught as a Baptist, many within churches that claimed to go back to the Bible could not explain from the Bible what they claim to believe! (**1 Pt 3:15**)

1 Peter 3:15 (NKJV) - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

2. This is not a new thing. In New Testament times these attitudes existed and would over time bear a terrible fruit. **(1 Tim 4:1-2, 6)**

1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NKJV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

1 Timothy 4:6 (NKJV) If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

3. A study of church history bears this out.

I. We must avoid the attitudes that lead to Apostasy.

- A. What is apostasy? **(2 Thess 2:3)** – “falling away”

2 Thessalonians 2:3 (NKJV) Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

1. ἀποστασία – *a falling away, defection, apostasy*; in the Bible namely, from the true religion: Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3; (Josh. 22:22; 2 Chr. 29:19; 33:19); Jer. 2:19 - Thayer's Lexicon
2. ἀποστασία as a condition resulting from changing loyalties *revolt, desertion*; as a religious technical term; (1) *apostasy, rebellion* (2TH 2.3); (2) *defection, abandonment* (AC 21.21) - Freiberg Lexicon
3. A “Changing of loyalties” is a good description of the term. **(Jer 2:19)**

Jeremiah 2:19 (NKJV) Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that *it is* an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the LORD your God, And the fear of Me *is* not in you,” Says the Lord GOD of hosts.

- B. Did the apostle Paul ever teach on this subject? **(Acts 20:26-32)**

Acts 20:26-32 (NKJV) Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*.²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.³² “So now, brethren, I commend

you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1. "For three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."
 2. When was the last time you heard a single sermon on this subject?
- C. Apostasy is defined by a people who demand the kind of teaching they want rather than demanding God's will alone without compromise be taught. **(2 Tim 4:1-4)**

2 Timothy 4:1-4 (NKJV) I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

1. Is this an optional subject? Ask Paul! "I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom."
 2. People can ask for Bible teaching and be running away from God. Look back at where you attend and see not only what has been taught, but what has not been taught.
- D. Men have substituted their loyalty for God for loyalty with other things. Consider some common substitutions. **(Luke 6:46-49)**

Luke 6:46-49 (NKJV) "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? ⁴⁷Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. ⁴⁹But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

1. **Loyalty to a church** - Often church traditions and church doctrines will not be given up or even be tested by a study of the Bible.
2. **Loyalty to a man** - Sometimes devotion to a famous preacher, a close friend, or a famous editor causes one to refuse to test or go against their teachings.
3. **Loyalty to family** - Many simply follow in the way they were raised without a willingness to test their religion. In some cases if the family makes a change, loyalty to the family means following without question.

4. **Loyalty to self** - Without question this is the most common loyalty that keeps men from listening to God. Study and change is time consuming, often emotionally draining, and requires strong faith and love for God and His word. It is usually easier to follow the established pattern. The question each of us must face: "Am I willing to listen to Jesus Christ?"

II. What things have historically divided brethren?

- A. From my limited view, most division comes from different attitudes we take towards our God and His word.
- B. If one concedes that the Bible is from God then several things must also be true about the Bible. **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV) ¹⁷ 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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- 1. "...that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- 2. Anything that God provides man is sufficient for the task it is intended!
Creation – **(Gen 1:31)**; Jesus as our Savior – **(Heb 7:25)**

Hebrews 7:25 (NKJV) ¹⁷ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

- C. One's attitude towards the Bible will in fact show one's attitude towards God.
(Jn 12:48-50)

John 12:48-50 (NKJV) ⁴⁹ He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. ⁴⁹For I have not spoken on My own *authority*; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. ⁵⁰And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

- 1. If we love God, then we must be seeking truth! Men quickly reveal their hearts when a Bible is opened and light is shown on their deeds. **(Jn 3:19-21)**

John 3:19-21 (NKJV) ²⁰ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

2. Two attitudes – two destinies – Where are you? (1 Jn 4:1, 6)

1 John 4:1 (NKJV) – Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:6 (NKJV) – We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

3. What do people mean when they call others “legalist,” “traditionalist,” and “Pharisees?” Ask them if they can find and stand in “the truth?”

D. It is not “legalism” or “traditionalism” to pursue a principled life based upon definitive answers found in the word of God.

1. New Testament Christians would have been startled that anyone would ever question the need to seek the truth about all things God revealed.

2. Consider how the Apostle John described Christians in **2 John**.

2 John 1:1-4 (NKJV) – The Elder, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, ²because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: ³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. ⁴I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.

a. “all those who have known the truth” (1:1)

b. “the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever” (1:2)

c. “I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” (1:4)

3. Later John plainly wrote that we need to know if “we are of the truth.” (1 Jn 3:19)

1 John 3:19 (NKJV) – And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

III. Historical Divisions follow a common path – Consider the Christian Church

A. In this section we wish to identify specific issues that may divide us.

1. It is a serious mistake to represent only one or two issues as the cause of division!

2. There are many areas of disagreement which must be recognized. These differences will vary from individual to individual. Let us now attempt to identify some issues.

3. At this point of our study we only want to recognize the differences and not to prove what is right or wrong. By dealing with these subjects in an orderly way, one at a time, we will be able to calmly study each subject.

4. One problem we must avoid is trying to create a cloud of dust and

confusion by jumping from subject to subject.

B. As an aid to identifying some issues let us examine an article written by Floyd Decker written in 1944. This article is not proof concerning right or wrong but it does show the changes that have occurred since that time.

"WHY I LEFT THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH"

Floyd A. Decker (1944)

1. The Christian Church has women Counselors, Directors, and Lecturers; the church of Christ does not (**I Tim 2:11,12; 1 Cor 14:34**).
2. The Christian Church has educational Directors, Associate Ministers and Youth Directors; the church of Christ has elders, deacons, evangelists and teachers (**Eph 4:11; Phil 1:1**).
3. The Christian Church has Missionary, Benevolent, and Educational organizations to execute the work of the church; the church of Christ does not (**Eph 4:4; 3:10,21**).
4. The Christian Church celebrates days of heathen worship, such as Easter, Mother's Day, and Christmas; the church of Christ does not (**Gal 4:10**).
5. The Christian Church fellowships various denominations in their activities, leaving the impression that all are brethren; the church of Christ does not. (**Rom 1:16; 2 Jn 9-11; Gal 1:6-10**)
- 6 The Christian Church seeks to get crowds with Youth Meetings, Campaigns for Christ, Rallies, Drives and Promotions; the church of Christ does not (**Rev 22:18-19**).
7. The Christian Church emphasizes society and the physical man by appealing to the carnal nature--with church carnivals, bands, plays, choruses, dramatics, church kitchens, church camps, and elaborate fellowship halls; the church of Christ does not (**I Cor 10:7; 11:22-34; Rom 14:17**).
8. The Christian Church elevates its preachers above the rest of the members by using such titles as Pastor, Superintendent, President, Doctor, and Reverend; the church of Christ does not (**Mt 23:5-12; Job 32:21, 22**).
9. The Christian Church takes up collections at services other than on the first day of the week, and uses unscriptural means such as suppers, property rentals, and special collections to raise money for the church; the church of Christ follows **I Cor 16:1-2** by having each member lay by in store on the first day of the week. This is the only way of raising money.

10. The Christian church misuses the name "Christian" (a noun) by speaking of "Christian nations", "Christian schools", and the "Christian Church "; the church of Christ does not (**Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16**).

11. The Christian Church owns and operates publishing houses, radio stations, hospitals, and other Benevolent Societies,' the church of Christ build nothing but churches (**Eph 3:21**).

12. The Christian Church owns, supports, and operates schools for secular education, beginning with kindergartens and going all the way through theological seminaries; the church of Christ does not (**I Tim 3:15**).

13. The Christian Church has a compromising attitude and spirit, will not defend its doctrine, is nothing but a man-made denomination, has no regard for the authority of the Bible, bases its practice on the silence of the scriptures, and appeals to the traditions of the elders rather than the simple unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. the Christian Church is no part of the N. T church, and should not be regarded as a friend of Christ nor of the truth.

C. Be sure your understand not just what name the issues go by but what they mean!

1. On one occasion after reading this article publicly, a young lady left the services believing I was against supporting "missionaries" because of the article against missionary societies!
2. I recommend reading concerning the issues and attitudes that brought about the division producing the Christian Church around the turn of the century (1900).
3. There may be other areas of study to add to this list. One other area I would add is the arrangement called "the Sponsoring Church".