

*How do the apostle's words instruct us concerning doctrinal differences?*

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**Introduction:** The apostle's words are sufficient to help us in all things that we may face.

A. Jesus wants us to imitate Him through the words He gave to the Apostles.

1. We are to empty all of our thoughts, teachings and practices and replace them with the revealed words of God. **(Jn 8:28-29; 1 Pt 4:11)**

**John 8:28-29** - Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. <sup>29</sup> "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."

**1 Peter 4:11** - <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen

2. This involves a reasoning process that involves arguments, discerning contradictions, and applying the word of God to today's issues. **(2 Cor 10:3-5)**

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5** - For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, <sup>5</sup> casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

3. Jesus will let us often be tested for our good!

C. Jesus wants all of us – heart, mind and soul! **(Mt 22:37-40)**

**Matthew 22:37-40** - Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> "This is *the* first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> "And *the* second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

1. Serving God is more than correct reasoning, but correct reasoning is a part!
2. We must know the nature of God and come to love Him. On that foundation we reason and discern the paths of our lives. **(Eph 3:17-19)**

**Ephesians 3:17-19** - that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height -- <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God

***I. How does correct understanding of doctrine affect our relationship with God and with other Christians?***

A. The Bible clearly reveals that there are doctrines that separate us from God and should separate us from brethren that hold them. **(2 John 9-11)**

**2 John 9-11** - Whoever transgresses and *does not abide in the doctrine of Christ* does *not have God*. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.<sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;<sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

1. There were many issues that were connected to the question of whether Jesus came in the flesh.
2. The key question was if one was willing to hear and abide only in the teachings revealed by the apostles. **(1 Jn 4:1, 5-6; Acts 2:42)**

**1 John 4:1** - 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 4:5-6** - They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as of the world*, and *the world hears them*.<sup>6</sup> 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*.

**Acts 2:42** - And they continued steadfastly *in the apostles' doctrine* and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

B. Doctrinal discernment was commended and a lack of discernment could result in the destruction of a local church. **(Rev 2:2, 14-16, 20-24)**

**Revelation 2:2** - "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that *you cannot bear those who are evil*. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

**Revelation 2:14-16** - "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who *hold the doctrine of Balaam*, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.<sup>15</sup>

"Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, *which thing I hate*.

<sup>16</sup> "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

**Revelation 2:20-23** - "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because *you allow that woman Jezebel*, who calls herself a prophetess, *to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols*.<sup>21</sup> "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.<sup>22</sup> "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.<sup>23</sup> "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

1. In Ephesus they correctly discerned doctrine but lost their first love. Again, discernment is part and not the whole of a Christian's walk. **(Rev 2:4-5)**
2. We cannot be like the Corinthians that developed a spirit of pride that concluded that doctrinal agreement or getting the "right religious code" was *never* an issue for a Christian! **(2 Cor 11:2-4)**

**2 Corinthians 11:2-4** -For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if he who comes *preaches another Jesus* whom *we have not preached*, or *if you receive a different spirit* which *you have not received*, or *a different gospel* which *you have not accepted* -- **you may well put up with it!**

3. The open-ended fellowship approach resulted in an “anti-reason” approach to doctrinal issues. Paul showed the absurdity of this position. **(2 Cor 11:19-21)**  
**2 Corinthians 11:19-21** -For you put up with fools gladly, since you *yourselves* are wise! <sup>20</sup> For you put up with it if *one brings you into bondage*, if *one devours you*, if *one takes from you*, if *one exalts himself*, if *one strikes you on the face*. <sup>21</sup> To our shame, I say that *we were too weak for that!* But in whatever anyone is bold -- I speak foolishly -- I am bold also.

C. How do we deal with the various levels of understanding and maturity among Christians?

1. Here is an area where great discernment is needed.
2. Often brethren try to frame this issue in extremes and push towards easy answers. (Ex. “You must divide on all doctrinal issues.” Or “Doctrinal issues have no part of the unity of Christians.”)

## ***II. Key Truths in Unity and Doctrinal Differences***

A. Resolving doctrinal differences *is a vital part of unity*. **(1 Cor 1:10; 4:6)**

**1 Corinthians 1:10** -Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that there be no divisions* among you, but *that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*.

**1 Corinthians 4:6** - Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us *not to think beyond what is written*, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

1. A position that eliminates the need to resolve differences is wrong!
2. How did brethren resolve doctrinal differences? **(Acts 15:1-2, 5-7, 22)**

**Acts 15:1-2** - And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup> Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, *to the apostles and elders*, about this question.

**Acts 15:5-7** -But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses." <sup>6</sup> Now *the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter*. <sup>7</sup> And when *there had been much dispute*, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

**Acts 15:22** - Then *it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

3. Any leadership that runs from controversy will get greater controversy in time!

4. Both personal and doctrinal differences should be addressed.

B. We must put fellowship with God as our first priority.

1. Doctrinal compromise is viewed as adultery! (**Jer 23:14-17**)

**Jeremiah 23:14-17** - Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also *strengthen the hands of evildoers*, So that *no one turns back from his wickedness*. All of them are like Sodom to Me, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah. <sup>15</sup> "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, *I will feed them with wormwood*, And make them drink the water of gall; For from the prophets of Jerusalem Profaneness has gone out into all the land.' " <sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. *They make you worthless*; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>17</sup> They *continually say to those who despise Me*, 'The LORD has said, "*You shall have peace*" '; And to everyone who *walks according to the dictates of his own heart*, they say, '*No evil shall come upon you.*' "

2. God strongly warns against extending fellowship to “those who despise Me”

(**Jer 23:17; 1 Jn 2:19; 1 Cor 11:18-19**)

**Jeremiah 23:17** - They continually say *to those who despise Me*, 'The LORD has said, "You shall have peace" '; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.' "

**1 John 2:19** - They went out from us, but *they were not of us*; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

**1 Corinthians 11:18-19** - For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are **divisions** among you, and in part I believe it. <sup>19</sup> For *there must also be factions among you*, that *those who are approved may be recognized among you*.

3. The leadership of Israel said God’s “peace” was with upon those that despised God’s way and that “no evil shall come upon you.”

4. When Jeremiah tried to openly reason with these grace and love advocates suddenly all of this tolerance was *not shown towards Jeremiah*. (**Jer 18:18**)

**Jeremiah 18:18** - Then they said, "Come and *let us devise plans against Jeremiah*; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words."

5. Years ago I heard Hiram Hutto say "Preach the truth and fellowship will take care of itself!" My experience has been that open Bibles and open hearts will bring the fruit God wants.

C. We should distinguish between collective practices and individual practices.

1. When I am put in a position to personally be a part of that which I believe to be wrong then I must separate myself from that relationship. **(2 Cor 6:14-18)**

**2 Corinthians 6:14-18** -Do not be *unequally yoked together with unbelievers*. For what *fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?* And what *communion has light with darkness?* <sup>15</sup> And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among *them*. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." <sup>17</sup> Therefore "*Come out from among them And be separate*, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." <sup>18</sup> "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

2. When I am put in position of supporting men that do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, then their work is put on my account. In a positive way this is true of supporting faithful men. **(2 Jn 9-11, 3 Jn 4-8)**

**2 John 9-11** - Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup> for *he who greets him shares in his evil deeds*.

**3 John 4-8** - I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. <sup>5</sup> Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, <sup>6</sup> who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God*, you will do well, <sup>7</sup> because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup> We therefore ought to receive such, *that we may become fellow workers for the truth*.

D. We must give time for growth and development.

1. We need to be longsuffering as one grows in Christ. **(Eph 4:1-3, 14-16)**

**Ephesians 4:1-3** - I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, <sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, *bearing with one another in love*, <sup>3</sup> endeavoring to *keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*.

**Ephesians 4:14-16** - that we should no longer *be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, *may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ --* <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

2. However, when men seek to draw disciples to themselves then quick action needs to be taken. We must discern the difference! **(Rom 16:17-18; Gal 4:16-17)**

**Romans 16:17-18** - Now I urge you, brethren, note *those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned*, and avoid them. <sup>18</sup> For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

**Galatians 4:16-17** - Have *I therefore become your enemy* because *I tell you the truth*? <sup>17</sup> They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, *they want to exclude you*, that you *may be zealous for them*.

3. As a new Christian I knew very little about crucial questions in the Bible. I always tried to learn more and move forward because of my love for God.

**(Heb 11:6)**

**Hebrews 11:6** -But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is *a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*.

### **III. Empty approaches that cause people to ignore doctrinal differences**

#### A. A misapplication of Romans 14.

1. There is a specific kind of difference addressed in this chapter! All positions mentioned are right with God within themselves. **(Rom 14:1-4)**

**Romans 14:1-4** - Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. <sup>2</sup> For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.

<sup>3</sup> Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

2. Paul takes one of the issues and clearly expounds upon it. **(Rom 14:14)**

**Romans 14:14** - I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.

3. If all doctrinal differences are placed in the instructions in this chapter then:  
(1) No doctrinal difference should have an impact on fellowship with God or with brethren. **(v3)** (2) We would be sinning to tell another they are wrong about a matter and then trying to teach them! **(v4)**

#### B. A refusal to apply scriptures to modern day questions.

1. Similar to the point made earlier about the misuse of expository preaching, some are taking the view that only issues specifically named in the scriptures should we be concerned with.
2. I have seen different lists by brethren but here are a few items named: drug abuse, the use of instrumental music in worship, multi-church organizations, understanding baptism to be essential to salvation, the day of the Lord's Supper and giving and pre-millennialism and like issues!

3. Please note that Satan has for years just changed the name of a thing and people went along! Consider this simple statement in the works of the flesh “And the like.” (**Gal 5:21**)

**Galatians 5:21** - envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, *and the like*; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

C. Extending forgiveness and fellowship without correcting false doctrinal practices.

1. This is similar to the position many take in Romans 14. “Continuous Cleansing” or automatic forgiveness means that since God accepts you, then others must as well.
2. We need to depend upon the conditional promises of God and let God handle all the special situations one may envision. (**1 Jn 1:7-9; Acts 8:22**)

**1 John 1:7-9** - But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our **Acts 8:22** - "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

D. Too many have developed a philosophical approach to doctrinal differences that ends with closed Bibles and conclusions without serious study!

1. Those who take these approaches also commonly scapegoat brethren who say we must work out our doctrinal differences.
2. Division, despair among brethren and bad attitudes are all attributed to those who want open study and resolve questions that come amongst us. The “Pharisee” label is abundantly used by the grace advocates!
3. If something has value you will learn to fight for it!

**Conclusion:** We ought to hear God rather than men! (**Jer 7:9-10**)

**Jeremiah 7:9-10** <sup>9</sup> "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, <sup>10</sup> "and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?"

### ***How Doctrine Disrupts Unity***

***By Gary W. Summers***

As one considers the plethora of "Promise Keeper" rallies there have been in the past few years, as well as all of the unity forums and ecumenical efforts, one simply must wonder how there could be any religious division left in America. How many "lovefests" have occurred in which it has been announced that the sounds the people gathered together were hearing were those old "denominational walls" tumbling down. How many times has Max Lucado oozed forth his false teaching on unity to the delight of emotionally-guided sycophants?

YET THERE'S NO UNITY! First, people left the Southern Baptists because in their conventions some thought they ought to stand for something. When they did, some suggested an exodus to a more moderate, tolerant (translate "spineless") group. No matter what the cause, the idea of standing for what

the Bible teaches is viewed as a "risky scheme" by many. Oh, it is easy enough to formulate a statement that harmonizes with the Scriptures and vote on it. But then the news media jumps in, all aghast, and, rather than make a defense, some prefer sidle off the stage of controversy.

Now the Presbyterians are the focus of controversy, and who can predict what havoc their two current conferences will wreak? So far, three issues have arisen. *The Dallas Morning News* reported on June 9th concerning the first one with this headline: "Some Presbyterians Fear Splintering Over Ordination of Gays" (1G). Just about every different viewpoint has been reported. One "interim pastor" from Austin said: "There's no consensus--no single mind in Christ on these issues" (5G). He advocates "an incomplete resolution."

What is that supposed to mean? "We are resolved that people should either agree or disagree with ordaining homosexuals." Say, there is a middle-of-the-road proposition! The authoritative Word clearly teaches that a person cannot become a child of God if he or she is a practicing homosexual, let alone attempt to teach Christianity to others. It is a sin which must be repented of (**1 Cor. 6:9-11**).

"I wish we could disagree and still be able to love one another," one delegate said (5G). Love has nothing to do with it. People ought to love as God does--He does not quit loving us when we are wrong. Love and fellowship, however, are two different things. If someone begins to teach the devil's doctrine, God still loves him, but He will no longer fellowship him. Instead, He will call on him to repent. Imagine Paul saying, "Lord, I have decided to quit preaching against sin. I'm going to tell people that fornication, homosexuality, and divorce for every cause are all right." How long would Paul have remained an apostle? When God speaks on a subject, that ends the discussion and any future debate.

Another "pastor" commented: "If they let each presbytery decide whether to ordain gays and lesbians, then what's not to stop them from letting each presbytery decide its own theology?" (5G). Of course, control over all their members is the basis for a denomination in the first place. All of them began with a specific doctrine. Now they have annual conventions to decide what that doctrine is. Of course, if they relied on the Scriptures in the first place, they would neither be a denomination nor have an annual convention.

God never designed the church to decide doctrine. Jesus is the head over the church, and he ordained elders to lead each congregation in the Truth. Men have no authority to invent their own teachings. Those who love God continue even to this day "in the apostles' doctrine" (**Acts 2:42**).

The June 16th headline in *The Dallas Morning News* was "Delegates Vote To End Presbyterians' Ban on Gay Ministers" (1A). The assembly voted to give each of the 173 presbyteries an opportunity to ratify the proposal during this next year. If the majority does so, their ministers can be openly homosexual. The head of the Presbyterians for Renewal said: "What has crept into the Presbyterian Church is not just a difference of opinion, but unbelief."

He is right. This decision is a rejection of what the Bible teaches. But so is denominationalism itself. One wonders when was the last time that he or other denominational officials were called upon to defend their existence. What passage speaks of the Presbyterian Church? Who were Presbyterians in the Bible? In what passage did Jesus decide to build His church and divide it into various branches? May those who see this General Assembly decision as an assault on faith and the integrity of the Scriptures use it as a springboard to re-examine **ALL** their practices! May this defeat serve as a catalyst to cause them to return to the Scriptures in all things!

The moderator of the General Assembly "asked the assembly to pause for prayer four times during debate. After the votes were tallied, he asked for silence and another moment of prayer" (20). Is prayer supposed to sanctify the decision? Will prayer somehow take corruption and turn it into purity? Will prayer take error and transform it into truth? Too often people assume that, once they have prayed about something, their decision must have been prompted by the very wisdom of God. No wonder foolishness reigns!

### ***The Battle Over John 14:6***

One would think that the General Assembly of Presbyterians would have been worn out over the decision on ordaining homosexuals, but no--they also decided to tackle an even more controversial topic: whether or not to believe **John 14:6**. Of course, that was not the way they put it. Rather, they voted on "Is Jesus



the only way to salvation?" Having already voted down **Romans 1 and Jude 7**, guess what they decided? According to a June 15th article in *The Dallas Morning News*, a majority of more than 500 delegates voted against a proposal "that said Jesus is the lone vehicle of salvation" (4A). As one person put it, if salvation does not come through Jesus alone, "who are the other deities we are talking about?" Also, what does **John 14:6** mean?

"One side called for tolerance of non-Christian faiths." So what did the other side call for--shooting them? People misunderstand tolerance. Christians can be civil and non-threatening to anyone who is not a Christian: atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, etc. Tolerance, however, does not mean refusing to tell them that these religions are wrong and that they will be lost in their sins unless they come to God through Jesus. Since when has it been a matter of: "Agree with me, or I'll kill you"? Did the apostles and Christians in the first century go forth with swords to convert the world? No, they were armed with the Gospel. If people cannot be converted with reason and evidence, they will just have to remain part of the majority (**Matt. 7:13-14**).

One delegate commented: "I don't have the right to say that other people can't find God in other ways." Why not? Jesus said it. People are afraid to speak the truth because of the way the "politically correct" will pillory them. At least when Peter denied the Lord, he feared for his life (he still sinned in so doing), but this individual and others like him are perpetually spineless. Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and for the remainder of his life. He was not ashamed to tell the Jews that they were wrong in crucifying Jesus (which was not a lack of love on his part), nor did he hesitate in saying, "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). But those who are afraid to say the same thing today demonstrate continual cowardice.

Either Jesus is THE way, or He is not. He is not A way, implying that other "Saviors" may also get people to Heaven. If He is not THE way; then He is NO way. Jesus told people that they were either for Him or against Him (**Matt. 12:30**). No Scripture says, "I am *sort* of the way, *kind* of the truth, and *perhaps* the life (for some)." Denominations have been insisting, in response to criticism of their existence, "We are all just trying to get to Heaven. We're just traveling different roads." They should not be surprised that some are now willing to let some of those other roads belong to various "world religions." Pluralism is making great headway. Even the columnist acknowledged this fact and said that once a question such as this one would have been a "no-brainer."

One "Senior Pastor" here in Dallas commented on this decision. He accused the General Assembly of exercising "creative unbelief." (*The Dallas Morning News*, June 23, 28A). After stating that Jesus is the *only* path to salvation, he commented: "Every once in a while we have a General Assembly that, unhooked from its Biblical/theological moorings, kicks against the goads...." He concludes by saying that "it truly is a sad day in the life of the Presbyterian Church USA." *Unbelief* is an appropriate designation for doctrines that oppose the Scriptures. Again, the very concept of denominationalism unhooks people from their Biblical moorings.

### **Days of Creation**

Heretofore we have been discussing recent events occurring in the Presbyterian Church USA. Meeting the week following this group was the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). According to *The Dallas Morning News*, the "more conservative PCA is the smaller of the country's two main Presbyterian denominations" (June 16, 5G). The PCA is slightly more than 10% of the PCUSA. For those who are wondering about the difference, the smaller group would not currently even consider ordaining homosexuals; they also do not believe in ordaining women as "pastors."

They follow the Westminster Confession of Faith which states: "It pleased God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost...in the beginning to create...the world...in the space of six days; and all was very good." This smaller group is now debating whether the days of Genesis are literal or not. Theoretically, they must also be debating whether or not their Confession of Faith also meant six literal days.

Last year their General Assembly decided that there were four possible interpretations to the means by which God created the world. The article does not state what they are, beyond mentioning the literal and the figurative. Presumably there is a "gap" theory in there somewhere and perhaps even a "modified gap" theory. None of these, except the literal, is correct. The rest came into being to try to accommodate evolution, which some mistakenly thought had been proved. Yet after 142 years since Darwin wrote *The*

*Origin of the Species*, evolution remains an unsubstantiated theory, and the numbers in Genesis are still literal.

A day **may** stand for more than a twenty-four hour period of time in the Bible, but not when it is preceded by words such as *first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh*. Day is not used figuratively when it has an evening and a morning, either. **Exodus 20:11** is not the least ambiguous as it explains the reason for the fourth commandment, keeping the Sabbath day holy: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

There is not one reason ever given in the Biblical text to doubt that these were six literal days. If someone wanted to convey the idea that these were six literal days, what more could have been written toward that end? How many Israelites ever doubted that it was six literal days? Only when evolution demanded eons of time did anyone ever consider any other explanation. But all alternate explanations are vain because this truth is so well established in the Scriptures. It is strange that a "conservative" group that believes the Bible is inspired would question this teaching.

### ***Denominationalism and Unity***

So what have we seen about unity? Unity can exist in one of two ways: 1) By regarding the Bible as it is in truth--the inspired Word of God (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**), or 2) By disregarding the Bible and any doctrine whatsoever. This last method is advanced by Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado and others. Forget any specific Bible teaching; let's just affirm our love for each other. Hugs can hide a multitude of instructions.

The problem with unity rallies is that they only last so long as people do not attend worship anywhere on a regular basis. Sooner or later, somebody is going to insist that the Bible be studied, and then there will be disunity. There are already two large groups of Presbyterians. Members of the denomination cannot get along with each other: hence, two groups. But they cannot get along with each other, either. The larger group just resolved to ordain homosexuals; some will rebel against that. They refused to uphold that Jesus is THE way to eternal life, and some are upset about that. The more conservative group is debating the literalness of **Genesis 1**. If there are four interpretations, and all of them are equally acceptable, that is tantamount to saying that we cannot know the Truth.

See what a problem doctrine is? No wonder unity meetings are about *feeling good*. **Thinking** would kill them. No wonder shallow messages are gaining in popularity and people prefer entertainment to reason and analysis. The minute something of substance is taught, disagreement erupts.

How did Jesus deal with this problem? He chose substance. What about when people disagreed with Him? He showed them where they were wrong and what the Truth was (**Matt. 22**). "But He didn't unite all of them," someone observes. Sure He did. He united them against Himself and His disciples. Unity is desirable, but Truth is paramount. Jesus would have united all of Israel if He could have; it was His devout wish (**Matt. 23:37**). But Truth (doctrine) is more important--even if disunity results and prevails.

Only a few will choose to walk in Truth. The rest will reject it--because of tradition (**Matt. 15:1-9**), immorality (**2 Peter 2**), the desire to have their own following (**Acts 20:30**), peer pressure (**Matt. 26:69-75**), lukewarmness (**Rev. 3:15-16**), or because they have lost their first love (Rev. 2:4). All of them will have to live eternally with their decision.

So long as doctrine thrives, there will be division among God's people. Even man-made denominations cannot avoid it. It is simply a fact of spiritual life. We do not rejoice in division, but we do rejoice in the Truth and in the God who revealed it to us. Only those who love Him will experience true unity forever.