

# Issues Of Distinction



**Some Key Issues  
Which Differentiate People Religiously**

**MARK A. COPELAND**

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**MarkCopeland@aol.com**

# Issues Of Distinction

## Introduction

### INTRODUCTION

1. As much as we might want to be religiously like those around us, there are certain “issues” that necessarily differentiate one from others
  - a. I call these “**Issues Of Distinction**”
  - b. I choose the word “distinction” because it means...
    - 1) The act of distinguishing; differentiation
    - 2) The condition or fact of being dissimilar or distinct; difference
    - 3) A distinguishing factor, attribute, or characteristic
  - c. Therefore “issues of distinction” are those which distinguish one from others in some way
2. Such “issues of distinction” relate to matters of truth and error
  - a. For those who love truth, that which is error holds no attraction
    - 1) Remember what the wise man said about truth - **Pro 23:23**
    - 2) Jesus declared the value of truth in **Jn 8:31-32**
    - 3) John wrote highly of those who “walk in truth” - **3 Jn 3-4**
  - b. Devotion to the truth, then, will necessarily distinguish one from those who may subscribe to error
3. In this introductory lesson, I would like to...
  - a. Identify several important “**Issues Of Distinction**” (there are certainly others)
  - b. Illustrate how they necessarily distinguish one from others

[For example, one “issue of distinction” is...)

### I. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

#### **A. SOME QUESTION OR DENY THE EXISTENCE OF GOD...**

1. Such as **atheists**
2. Or **agnostics**

#### **B. OTHERS BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD...**

1. This includes those of all major religions, including:
  - a. Buddhists, Hindus
  - b. Jews, Moslems
  - c. Christians
2. The reasons for such belief may be varied, including:
  - a. Evidences in nature
  - b. Fulfilled prophecies in the Scriptures
  - c. Evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ

[As much as we may (and should) love or respect individuals who do not believe in a Supreme Being, this issue creates a fundamental difference between people. Another “issue of distinction” is... ]

## **II. THE IDENTITY OF GOD**

### **A. MANY BELIEVE IN A MULTITUDE OF GODS...**

1. Such as **Buddhists**
2. And **Hindus**

### **B. OTHERS BELIEVE THE GOD OF ABRAHAM IS THE ONE TRUE GOD...**

1. On this side of the “issue” are:
  - a. Jews and Moslems
  - b. Christians
2. The reason why people believe in the God of Abraham may vary:
  - a. Jews believe because of Moses and the Prophets
  - b. Christians believe because of Moses, the Prophets, and Jesus Christ
  - c. Moslems believe because of all these plus Mohammed, their final prophet

[Again, we should respect and love those who are Hindus and Buddhists, but this is an “issue of distinction” which distinguishes us. A third issue is...]

## **III. THE IDENTITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH**

### **A. MANY BELIEVE THAT JESUS WAS SIMPLY A GOOD MAN, PERHAPS A PROPHET, BUT NO MORE..**

1. Many **Jews** hold a view of Jesus that He was a good man, but not the Messiah
2. **Moslems** believe that He was a prophet, but not the Son of God

### **B. OTHERS BELIEVE JESUS TO BE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD...**

1. On this side of the “issue”, are all professing Christians
2. Together with Peter, they freely confess: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”  
- cf. **Mt 16:13-16**
3. Their reasons would include such things as:
  - a. Fulfilled Messianic prophecies
  - b. Evidences for His resurrection from the dead

[Now, it would be wonderful if all who accepted the true identity of Jesus were united (this was Jesus’ prayer - **Jn 17:20-21**). But unfortunately there are “issues of distinction” which differentiate even those who believe in Jesus...]

## **IV. THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES**

### **A. MANY DISPUTE THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES...**

1. E.g., **Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, etc.**, who accept in addition to the Bible:
  - a. Traditions of the church
  - b. Papal or ecclesiastical decrees

2. E.g., **Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, Pentecostals, etc.**, who believe in the need for:
  - a. Latter-day prophets
  - b. Modern-day revelations

**B. OTHERS BELIEVE THE SCRIPTURES TO BE AN ALL-SUFFICIENT GUIDE...**

1. On this side of the issue would be most mainstream Protestant churches
2. Reasons are based upon the claim of the Scriptures themselves:
  - a. To be sufficient for making the man of God complete - cf. **2 Ti 3:16-17**
  - b. To have been revealed one time, for all time - cf. **Ju 3**

[Where there are different standards of authority, people will not be able to agree. This make the issue of the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures an "issue of distinction". Yet another issue is...]

**V. THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM**

**A. MANY DENY BAPTISM HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH SALVATION...**

1. This includes many **mainstream Protestant denominations**
2. Who teach that baptism is simply a confession of faith and not necessary to salvation

**B. OTHERS BELIEVE THE BIBLE TEACHES BAPTISM TO BE NECESSARY...**

1. Necessary for salvation - **Mk 16:16**
2. Necessary for the remission of sins - **Ac 2:38**
3. Necessary for becoming children of God through faith - **Ga 3:26-27**

**C. IF THIS LATTER CONVICTION BE TRUE...**

1. Then those who teach otherwise are not proclaiming the gospel Jesus and His apostles proclaimed, which is God's power unto salvation - **Mk 16:15-16; Ro 1:16**
2. Paul warned about those teaching a perverted gospel - **Ga 1:8-9**

[Finally, another issue that differentiates people is...]

**VI. THE NATURE OF THE LORD'S CHURCH**

**A. SOME DENOMINATIONALIZE THE CHURCH...**

1. I fear this is the case with **many Churches of Christ**, and especially **The International Church of Christ**
2. By changing the nature of cooperation among local churches, they create a de facto denomination

**B. OTHERS BELIEVE THE SCRIPTURES TO REVEAL A LIMITED FORM OF CHURCH COOPERATION...**

1. Local churches may cooperate, but in ways that:
  - a. Follow the New Testament pattern for church cooperation
  - b. Allow local churches to maintain their local autonomy and independence
2. E.g., congregations may support preachers, missionaries, needy Christians or churches

3. But the New Testament pattern reveals this was done directly, with no intermediate or overseeing church

## CONCLUSION

1. Love for one's fellow man...
  - a. Makes one want to accept everyone as they are
  - b. And to let nothing come between us
2. But love for God and truth must be stronger...
  - a. It must take precedent over love for our fellow man
  - b. It must prompt one to let whatever is truly an "issue of distinction" differentiate one from those who believe otherwise
3. Of course, it is very important...
  - a. That we do not artificially put up barriers
  - b. To diligently study matters to determine whether they merit such importance as to differentiate ourselves from others
  - c. To present our conviction on such matters in the proper spirit:
    - 1) Speaking the truth in love - **Ep 4:15**
    - 2) Without quarreling, in gentleness, with patience and humility - **2 Ti 2:24-25**

In the rest of this series I hope to do just that, as we examine each "issue of distinction" surveyed in this lesson in greater detail...

# Issues Of Distinction

## The Existence Of God

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson, we introduced several “**Issues Of Distinction**”, matters which by their nature differentiate those with opposing views...
  - a. The existence of God
  - b. The identity of God
  - c. The identity of Jesus of Nazareth
  - d. The all-sufficiency of the Scriptures
  - e. The purpose of baptism
  - f. The nature of the Lord’s church
  
2. I concluded by saying that it is important...
  - a. That we do not artificially put up barriers
  - b. To diligently study matters to determine whether they merit such importance as to differentiate ourselves from others
  - c. To present our conviction on such matters in the proper spirit:
    - 1) Speaking the truth in love - **Ep 4:15**
    - 2) Without quarreling, in gentleness, with patience and humility - **2 Ti 2:24-25**
  
3. Therefore, if an issue is such that it is one of “distinction”, we ought to be able to...
  - a. Explain why we believe the way we do
  - b. Present reasons why those who differ ought to reconsider their convictions

[In this study, we shall take a closer look at the first “issue of distinction”: **The Existence of God...**]

### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE

#### **A. IF GOD DOES NOT EXIST...**

1. Then atheists and agnostics are on the side of **truth**
2. Then there is no Supreme Being to which we must give an account
  - a. I.e., no Judgment Day
  - b. I.e., no heaven or hell
3. There is no reason to be accountable to anyone but ourselves
4. There is no right or wrong, no good or evil
5. We would best live by the saying: **“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die”**

#### **B. BUT IF GOD DOES EXIST...**

1. Then there is a Supreme Being to Whom we must give an account
2. We owe to ourselves to learn whatever we can...
  - a. About the **nature** of this God
  - b. About what He may **require** of us

3. Such a search for knowledge concerning this God may be lifelong, but if there is a God, then it is worth it! - cf. **Jer 9:23-24**

[In any issue of controversy, the burden of proof rests upon those who argue in the affirmative; so what are the **evidences** presented by those who affirm that God exists?]

## **II. EVIDENCES FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

### **A. THE “ONTOLOGICAL” ARGUMENT...**

1. This argument was espoused by Anselm, a theologian and philosopher, also the archbishop of Canterbury (ca. 1100 A.D.)
  - a. It runs something like this: **If man can have the concept of a perfect God, then He must exist**
  - b. It is based upon the premise that everything man can know or think is based upon some reality (though often perverted)
2. “This is probably one of the weakest of the philosophical arguments; and to many this argument is somewhat unconvincing.” (J. D. Thomas, Facts & Faith)

### **B. THE “GENERAL” ARGUMENT...**

1. This argument is based upon **the universal belief in God and the religious instinct**
  - a. “Men in all the world, and throughout all time, not only believe in deity, but also engage in acts of worship and devotion.” - cf. **Ac 17:26-27**
  - b. “The religious principle is extremely potent in all nations, dominating their thought and history.”
  - c. “Everywhere the human heart has a craving for God. There will be exceptions as individuals, but the exceptions do not invalidate the rule. The atheist is an exception in every society!” (Ferrell Jenkins, Introduction To Christian Evidences)
2. This argument reasons in this way:
  - a. Since there is in the universe those things that satisfy man’s deepest longings...
  - b. ...there must be a reality (i.e., God) that complements and meets this universal craving for a Supreme Being

### **C. THE “COSMOLOGICAL” ARGUMENT...**

1. This is also called “the argument from first cause”
  - a. It is based upon the premise **every effect must have a cause**
  - b. The cosmos (universe) is an effect that has adequate cause
  - c. The theist believes that **Gen 1:1** reveals that adequate cause: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”**
2. A common objection is often raised: “Who created God?”
  - a. It is important to bear in mind that the law which states every effect has a cause applies to things that are “physical”
  - b. God by definition is not physical, and therefore not bound by laws which we may discern to apply to physical things
    - 1) God is a spiritual being - cf. **Jn 4:24**
    - 2) His omnipresence is but one example of how He defies laws of nature - cf. **Jer 23:23-24**



- c. So the argument does not apply to Him, and He becomes the **uncaused cause** of all things!

#### **D. THE “TELEOLOGICAL” ARGUMENT...**

1. This argument is based upon **the evidence of design** in the universe
2. Evidence of design suggests a “designer”, some Being with intelligence possessing purpose
  - a. E.g., a watch shows design, and implies a watchmaker
  - b. To credit such intricate and precise workmanship to blind chance is unreasonable
3. Examples of design in the universe are many; some examples:
  - a. Orderly movement of heavenly bodies, making space travel possible
  - b. Animal instinct, such as the migration patterns of birds, eels, and salmon
  - c. The human body itself, e.g., the eye
4. Contemplating upon the universe and the human body rightfully produces awe, and points man to his Creator - cf. **Psa 19:1-2; 139:14; Ro 1:19-20**

#### **E. THE “MORAL” ARGUMENT...**

1. This is also called the “anthropological argument”
2. It is based upon reality that everywhere people have **a sense of ought**
  - a. That in certain circumstances, certain things should be done
  - b. People are concerned...
    - 1) That people should act a certain way
    - 2) That people do not often act the way they should
  - c. Even atheists and agnostics have **a sense of justice**, and are angered when it is violated (as in the case of rape and murder)
3. This moral nature in man demands a Moral Being as the Original Cause

#### **F. THE “ESTHETICAL” ARGUMENT...**

1. This argument is based upon **the presence of beauty and sublimity** in the universe
2. It observes that you have both...
  - a. The presence of beauty in nature itself, and in art produced by man
  - b. The response of man to such beauty
3. How did this “beauty”, and the “ability to appreciate” it, develop?
  - a. Were both the result of blind chance?
  - b. Or did it come from a Supreme Being, who is not only...
    - 1) Intelligent (an argument from design)
    - 2) Moral (an argument from our sense of ought)...but also Artistic (an argument from beauty and our sense of it)? - cf. **Psa 96:4-6**

### **CONCLUSION**

1. These arguments we have considered are **philosophical arguments**, but they are based upon what the Bible itself says can be learned about God from nature - **Psa 19:1-2; Ro 1:20**
2. The arguments we have considered are some of the reasons why so many believe in the existence of God, be they Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc.

3. Other arguments can be offered to support the existence of God...
    - a. Fulfilled prophecies in the Scriptures
    - b. Scientific foreknowledge of the Scriptures
    - c. Uniformity of the Scriptures
    - d. Evidences for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
- **But these arguments we shall consider as we examine other “issues of distinction”**

Who is this Supreme Being? In our next study, we shall take a look at **“The Identity Of God”**...

# Issues Of Distinction

## The Identity Of God

### INTRODUCTION

1. Our previous study briefly surveyed some of the arguments for the **existence** of God:
  - a. The **ontological** argument (if man can conceive of a perfect God, one must exist)
  - b. The **general** argument (the universal belief in God and man's religious instinct)
  - c. The **cosmological** argument (every effect must have a cause; the cosmos is an effect, and its adequate cause is God)
  - d. The **teleological** argument (evidence of design necessitates a Designer)
  - e. The **moral** argument (moral nature in man and sense of "ought" demands a Moral Person in back of all things)
  - f. The **esthetical** argument (beauty in the universe and man's response to it suggests a Supreme Being with an eye for beauty)
- **These philosophical arguments are based upon what is seen in creation, which reveals something of the Creator - cf. Ro 1:20**
  
2. But these arguments do not, nor does the creation, **identify** who this Supreme Being is...
  - a. Is He the God revealed in the Bible?
  - b. Is He the God or Gods believed in by Hindus, Buddhists, etc.?
  - c. Or is He some Being yet to be discovered by mankind?

[In this study, we shall take a closer look at the second "issue of distinction": **The Identity of God...**]

### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE

#### **A. IF GOD IS NOT THE ONE REVEALED IN THE BIBLE...**

1. Then the Jew, the Moslem, and the Christian are in error
  - a. For they are united in their belief that He is the God of Abraham
  - b. And that He has revealed Himself through prophets
2. Then we should be looking elsewhere to learn who God is
  - a. Either to the eastern religions, such as Hinduism or Buddhism
  - b. Or perhaps some other religion among the many in the world

#### **B. IF GOD IS THE ONE REVEALED IN THE BIBLE...**

1. Then we owe it to ourselves to carefully read the Bible
  - a. To learn what God has revealed about Himself
  - b. To learn what God expects of mankind
2. Then we have narrowed down the choices as to what is the true religion in the world:  
Judaism, Christianity, or Islam

[As we proceed to consider arguments for believing that the God of the Bible is the One True God, a certain line of reasoning will be followed:

**The Bible claims to be the Word of the One True God; if this is true, we should find evidence of inspiration.**

What, then, are evidences that the Bible is really **inspired** of God?]

## **II. EVIDENCES FOR THE IDENTITY OF GOD**

### **A. THE UNIFORMITY OF THE SCRIPTURES...**

1. The Bible is a collection of **66 books**, written:
  - a. Over a **1600 year span**
  - b. Over a period of **40 generations**
  - c. By approx. **40 authors** from every walk of life; e.g.:
    - 1) **Moses**, a political leader trained in the universities of Egypt
    - 2) **Peter**, a fisherman
    - 3) **Amos**, a herdsman
    - 4) **Joshua**, a military general
    - 5) **Nehemiah**, a cup bearer to a king
    - 6) **Daniel**, a prime minister
    - 7) **Luke**, a physician
    - 8) **Solomon**, a king
    - 9) **Matthew**, a tax collector
    - 10) **Paul**, a tentmaker and rabbi
  - d. In different places
    - 1) Moses in the **wilderness**
    - 2) Jeremiah in a **dungeon**
    - 3) Daniel on a **hillside** and in a **palace**
    - 4) Paul inside **prison walls**
    - 5) Luke while **traveling**
    - 6) John in exile an the **isle of Patmos**
    - 7) Others in the rigors of **military campaign**
  - e. At **different times**
    - 1) David in times of **war**
    - 2) Solomon in times of **peace**
  - f. During **different moods**
    - 1) Some writing from the **heights of joy**
    - 2) Others from the **depths of sorrow and despair**
  - g. On **three continents**
    - 1) **Asia**
    - 2) **Africa**
    - 3) **Europe**
  - h. In **three languages**
    - 1) **Hebrew**
    - 2) **Aramaic**
    - 3) **Greek**
  - i. Which subject matter includes **hundreds of controversial topics**
    - 1) The origin of man & the universe

- 2) The nature of God
- 3) The nature of sin & man's redemption
2. Despite all this, there is **harmony** and **continuity!**
  - a. For example:
    - 1) "The Paradise Lost of the book of Genesis becomes the Paradise Regained of Revelation"
    - 2) "Whereas the gate to the tree of life is closed in Genesis, it is opened forevermore in Revelation." - **Geisler and Nix**
  - b. Compare the continuity of the Bible with any other such writings of man
    - 1) Imagine what you would have if you just took ten authors...
      - a) From one walk of life, one generation, one place, one time, one mood one continent, one language
      - b) Speaking on one controversial subject
    - 2) You would have a conglomeration of ideas, not harmony!
3. The **reason** for the **unity** of the Bible?
  - a. The writers were all inspired by the same God - cf. **2 Pe 1:20-21**
  - b. Providing evidence that the God of the Bible is the One True God!

## **B. THE SCIENTIFIC FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE BIBLE...**

1. The nature of this argument:
  - a. In the Bible there are scientific truths...
    - 1) That were unknown by man with all his wisdom and resources
    - 2) That are stated as facts hundreds of years in advance of the discovery of these truths by men
  - b. That the writers of the Bible could have known these facts only through inspiration
  - c. That such evidence of inspiration confirms they were writing or speaking for the One True God!
2. Just a few examples of facts written about in the Bible, but confirmed only recently with the aid of modern science...
  - a. The roundness of the earth - **Isa 40:22**
  - b. The suspension of the earth in space - **Job 26:7**
  - c. The currents in the seas - **Psa 8:8**
  - d. The springs in the seas - **Job 38:16**
  - e. All nations of one blood - **Ac 17:26**

## **C. FULFILLED PROPHECIES FOUND IN THE BIBLE...**

1. The nature of this argument:
  - a. The prophecies of the Old Testament foretold events in detail that were beyond the scope of human speculation
  - b. How did the writers do it?
    - 1) They attributed it to God!
    - 2) And God declared that such evidence was a proof of His existence and superiority over men and all heathen gods - **Isa 41:21-24; 42:8-9; 46:8-11**
2. A few examples (Messianic prophecies will be considered in the next study):
  - a. The fall of Babylon, written two hundred years before it occurred - **Isa 13:17-22**
  - b. The fall of Egypt, that it would be destroyed more by civil war than by outside forces

- **Isa 19:1-4**

- c. The fall of Nineveh, with its utter desolation - **Zep 2:13-15**
- d. The fall of Tyre, with its becoming a place for the spreading of nests - **Ezek 26:1-5**
- **Cf. Introduction To Christian Evidences, Ferrell Jenkins, pp. 87-107**

## CONCLUSION

1. We have briefly surveyed evidence suggesting the Bible to be inspired by a Supreme Being...
  - a. The uniformity of the Scriptures
  - b. The scientific foreknowledge of the Bible
  - c. Fulfillment of prophecies found in the Bible
  - **Our examples have been few, and simply illustrative; indeed, entire volumes have been written on this subject**
  
2. The Bible is either the work of men or of God; if it is from God...
  - a. Then it is easy to understand how these men could write as they did
  - b. Then the **identity** of the One True God is known:
    - 1) He is the God of the Bible!
    - 2) And that Book is His Word to us!
  
3. But among those who believe in the God of the Bible, there are differences...
  - a. **Most Jews** accept only the Old Testament portion as Scripture
  - b. **Christians** accept both the Old and New Testaments
  - c. **Moslems** believe that both the Old and New Testaments have been corrupted, so as to present an improper picture of Moses and Jesus
  
4. The core of these differences revolve around another “issue of distinction”: **The Identity Of Jesus Of Nazareth**

That is the “issue” we shall examine in our next study...

# Issues Of Distinction

## The Identity Of Jesus Of Nazareth

### INTRODUCTION

1. So far in this series we have considered two “issues of distinction”:
  - a. **The Existence Of God** - which differentiates between...
    - 1) Atheists and agnostics on the one hand
    - 2) Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc., on the other hand
  - b. **The Identity Of God** - which distinguishes between...
    - 1) Buddhists, Hindus, etc.
    - 2) Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc.
2. In doing so, we briefly surveyed evidence that supports a belief...
  - a. That God does exist
  - b. That the God of Abraham (i.e., the God of the Bible) is the one true God
3. Our next “issue of distinction” concerns “**The Identity Of Jesus Of Nazareth**”...
  - a. Jews and Moslems believe he was just a good man, perhaps even a prophet
  - b. But Christians profess much more, that He was the Messiah, even the Son of God!

[In this study, we shall briefly review the claims made about Jesus, and some evidence which supports these claims...]

### I. THE CLAIMS MADE ABOUT JESUS

#### **A. THE NEW TESTAMENT MAKES BOLD CLAIMS ABOUT JESUS...**

1. Presenting Him to be the Messiah, foretold by the Old Testament
  - a. As seen in the confession of Peter - cf. **Mt 16:13-17**
  - b. As seen in Luke’s description of Jesus’ conversation following His resurrection - cf. **Lk 24:25-27,44-48**
2. Presenting Him to be the very Son of God!
  - a. Again, as confessed by Peter - **Mt 16:16**
  - b. As introduced in John’s gospel - **Jn 1:1-3,14**

#### **B. THE NEW TESTAMENT ALLOWS ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES...**

1. Jesus is everything the New Testament authors claim
  - a. The Christ, the Son of God
  - b. Indeed, the King of Kings and Lord of lords - cf. **1 Ti 6:14-16**
2. The New Testament is a carefully orchestrated fraud, written purposefully to deceive!
  - a. The authors leave us no other choice - cf. **2 Pe 1:16-18**
  - b. Either their story is true, or they were false witnesses! - cf. **1 Co 15:14-15**

#### **C. WE CANNOT SAY THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN SINCERELY DECEIVED...!**

1. Especially in reference to the resurrection of Jesus, which is offered as the ultimate proof of His deity and Messiahship
  - a. They claim they ate and drank with Him afterwards - **Ac 10:39-41**
  - b. They claim they saw and touched Him - **1 Jn 1:1-4**
2. They leave us **no room** for saying they were but **mistaken** or **deceived!**
  - a. Some skeptics have tried to offer this as an alternative
  - b. That perhaps in their grief and loss over the crucifixion of Jesus they “hallucinated” or saw grief-inspired “visions” of Jesus
  - c. But “hallucinations” and “visions” are highly individualistic experiences
    - 1) One person might see the hallucination or vision
    - 2) But several or many people don’t see the same vision at the same time!
  - d. As outlined in the gospels and also **1 Co 15:4-8**, the resurrection appearances of Jesus were often witnessed by many at the same time (over 500 on one occasion!)

[So we really have no other choice; either the New Testament with its claims about Jesus is a **“Book Of Truth,”** or it is a **“Book of Lies.”** Which is more reasonable to believe? To help us decide, consider...]

## **II. IMPLICATIONS IF CLAIMS ABOUT JESUS ARE NOT TRUE**

### **A. THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED LIE...!**

1. With great accuracy the authors described events, places, and people (at least those we can confirmed by archaeology) - **Lk 2:1-5**
2. If the record of miracles and the resurrection is false, then they very carefully intertwined fact and fiction!  
**-- Is it reasonable to believe that?**

### **B. THE AUTHORS SUFFERED EXTREME HARDSHIP FOR WHAT THEY KNEW WAS A LIE...!**

1. Many people will lie if they can get something out of it (such as money, power)
2. But what did the apostles get out of it? - cf. **1 Co 4:9-13**
3. What did Paul get for holding to his testimony? - cf. **2 Co 11:24-29**
4. How do we know they really suffered this hardship?
  - a. The fact that the letters of the New Testament were even saved!
  - b. For example, consider the letters 1 & 2 Corinthians...
    - 1) These letters are filled with rebuke of the Corinthians
    - 2) The Corinthians would have every reason not to save these letters which exposed their faults
    - 3) The Corinthians had first hand knowledge as to whether the apostles and Paul really suffered the hardship spoken of in their letters
    - 4) If they knew the accounts of such hardship to be false, they would have quickly destroyed these letters written by a liar who embarrassingly wrote about their problems!
5. So especially the author of half the books of the New Testament (Paul) suffered extreme hardship for a lie, if the New Testament is not true  
**-- Is it logical to believe that?**



**C. THE AUTHORS WHO WERE MARTYRED KNEW THEY WERE DYING FOR A LIE...!**

1. True, many people in history have died for what was actually a lie...
  - a. They sincerely believed it be true; sadly, they were mistaken
  - b. But we have seen that the nature of the apostles' testimony as eyewitnesses of the resurrection does not allow for the possibility they were sincerely mistaken
2. History and tradition record that:
  - a. **James** was stoned to death
  - b. **Paul** was beheaded
  - c. **Peter** was crucified
3. If the New Testament is a lie, they went to their deaths **knowing** they were dying for a lie!  
-- **Is it rational to believe that?**

**D. IN SUFFERING AND DYING FOR A LIE, THEY WENT AGAINST EVERYTHING JESUS AND THEY THEMSELVES TAUGHT...!**

1. "But let your 'yes' be 'yes', and your 'no' be 'no'." - Jesus (**Mt 5:37**)
2. "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor..." - Paul (**Ep 4:25**)
3. "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking" - Peter (**1 Pe 2:1**)  
-- **Does it make sense to believe that?**

**E. THE BOOK WITH THE WORLD'S HIGHEST STANDARD AND LOFTIEST GOALS WAS COMPOSED BY LIARS, FRAUDS, AND DECEIVERS!**

1. What book presents a higher standard of love and morality than the New Testament?
2. For example, Jesus' "Sermon On The Mount" (**Mt 5-7**) and Paul's "Discourse On Love" (**1 Co 13**)  
-- **Can you believe it?**

**CONCLUSION**

1. This is what one **must** believe if they do not believe the New Testament when it speaks of the miracles, fulfilled Messianic prophecies and resurrection accounts of Jesus:
  - a. It is a carefully orchestrated lie!
  - b. The authors suffered extreme hardship for what they **knew** was a lie!
  - c. Those authors who were martyred **knew** they were dying for a lie!
  - d. In suffering and dying for a lie, they went against everything Jesus and they themselves taught!
  - e. And somehow, these liars, frauds, and deceivers came up with a book containing the world's highest standard morality and loftiest goals!
2. I am convinced that those who do not believe the New Testament are those who:
  - a. Have never read the New Testament carefully
  - b. Have not considered the logical implications of simply regarding it as a mixture of fact and fiction!
3. But to those who will read it, I believe that they will find...

- a. That it has “the ring of truth” to it
  - b. That it will convince one of the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth!
4. As John wrote toward the end of his gospel:

***“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (Jn 20:30-31)***

5. What is **your** view of Jesus of Nazareth?
- a. Are you willing to accept the evidence that ***“Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”***?
  - b. If so, then with such faith you have the right to become a child of God, and have ***“life in His name”***! - cf. **Jn 1:12; Ga 3:26-27**

# Issues Of Distinction

## The All-Sufficiency Of The Scriptures

### INTRODUCTION

1. In previous lessons we have briefly considered three “issues of distinction”:
  - a. **The Existence Of God** - which differentiates between...
    - 1) Atheists and agnostics on the one hand
    - 2) Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc., on the other hand
  - b. **The Identity Of God** - which distinguishes between...
    - 1) Buddhists, Hindus, etc.
    - 2) Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc.
  - c. **The Identity of Jesus Of Nazareth** - over which there is a difference between...
    - 1) Jews, Moslems, etc.
    - 2) Christians
2. It would be wonderful if all who accepted Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God” were one...
  - a. Jesus prayed for such unity - **Jn 17:20-21**
  - b. Paul commanded that we be one - **1 Co 1:10-13**
3. The main reason why there is not unity pertains to another “issue of distinction”...
  - a. That issue is **The All-Sufficiency Of The Scriptures**
    - 1) Are the Scriptures sufficient by themselves to lead us unto salvation?
    - 2) Or do we need other sources of authority for what we do in matters of religion?
  - b. One’s position on this issue will greatly affect his or her religious beliefs and practices!

[To illustrate why this is true, allow me to demonstrate how...]

### I. MANY DENY THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

#### **A. SUCH AS ROMAN CATHOLICS, GREEK ORTHODOX, ETC...**

1. Who accept in **addition** to the Bible...
  - a. Traditions of the church which have arisen over the years
  - b. Papal or ecclesiastical decrees
2. Allowing such “traditions” or “decrees” to take precedence over the Scriptures
  - a. E.g., using “Father” as a religious title, though Jesus forbid it - **Mt 23:9**
  - b. E.g., requiring celibacy for bishops, though Paul taught otherwise - **1 Ti 3:1-2**

#### **B. SUCH AS MORMONS, JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES, PENTECOSTALS, ETC...**

1. Who accept in **addition** to the Bible...
  - a. Latter-day prophets
  - b. Modern-day revelations
2. Who allow their “revelations” to take precedence over the Scriptures
  - a. E.g., the Mormons’ concept of God having a body of flesh - cf. **Jn 4:24; Lk 24:39**

- b. E.g., the Witnesses' denial of the bodily resurrection of Jesus - cf. **Lk 24:39-40; Jn 2:19-22**
- c. E.g., Pentecostals allowing women preachers - cf. **1 Co 14:34-37; 1 Ti 2:11-12**

[When people reject “the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures”, appealing to other sources for their authority in religion, division is the natural outcome. The first step towards unity is to recognize the need for the same standard of authority, and that standard is the Scriptures alone! But are the Scriptures alone an all-sufficient guide? Consider...]

## **II. THE ARGUMENT FOR THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES**

### **A. THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD HAS BEEN PROCLAIMED...**

- 1. In his address to the Ephesian elders...
    - a. Paul said he had proclaimed “*the whole counsel of God*” - **Ac 20:27**
    - b. He had held nothing back - **Ac 20:20**
  - 2. In leaving them, he entrusted them to the Word of God - **Ac 20:32**
    - a. Which was sufficient to “*build you up*”
    - b. Which was sufficient to “*give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*”
- **Note: Paul did not leave them to “revelations” yet to come, but to the Word of God which was sufficient to save them!**

### **B. WE HAVE ALL THINGS PERTAINING TO LIFE AND GODLINESS...**

- 1. Peter wrote how God has given us all things necessary for spiritual life and godly living - **2 Pe 1:3**
  - 2. Note well...
    - a. He had not given “some” things, but “all” things
    - b. He had not given “some” things now, with “more” things to come later
- **Whatever I need for “life and godliness”, I know it has been revealed in God’s Word!**

### **C. THE FAITH HAS BEEN REVEALED ONCE FOR ALL...**

- 1. Jude wrote of “*the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” - **Ju 3**
  - 2. In the Greek, “once for all” is “one time for all time”
    - a. I.e., the faith (that body of knowledge we are to believe) was delivered one time for all time
    - b. The faith wasn’t partly revealed, with more to come through later revelations years later!
    - c. The faith wasn’t revealed just for that generation, with a different faith to be revealed for a generation yet future!
- **Therefore the task we have is “to contend earnestly for the faith”, not be looking for a new faith to fit our desires or expectations!**

### **D. THE SCRIPTURES CAN MAKE US COMPLETE, EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK...**

- 1. Paul wrote to Timothy of the value of the Scriptures - **2 Ti 3:14-17**
  - a. Inspired of God, it is profitable for:

- 1) Doctrine
- 2) Reproof
- 3) Correction
- 4) Instruction in righteousness
- b. It is capable of making the man of God *“complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”*
  - 1) Not partial, but complete!
  - 2) Not some good works, but every good work!
- **What tradition, decree of man, or modern day revelation do any more than the inspired Word of God?**
2. When I turn to the Scriptures, I find that I have all I need to...
  - a. Believe in Jesus - **Jn 20:30-31**
  - b. Have life in His name - **Jn 20:30-31**
  - c. Have fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the apostles - **1 Jn 1:3**
  - d. Have joy that is full - **1 Jn 1:4**
  - e. Have help when I sin - **1 Jn 2:1**
  - f. Know that I have eternal life - **1 Jn 5:13**
  - g. Understand the revelation of the mystery of God - **Ro 16:25-26; Ep 3:3-4**
  - h. Be fruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom - **2 Pe 1:8-11**
- **What else must one know or have?**

## CONCLUSION

1. There will always be a distinction related to “the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures”
2. The distinction becomes apparent as one considers the doctrines and practices of any religious group...
  - a. Those who accept it are more apt to be like the church you read about in the Bible
  - b. Those who deny it will quickly evolve into something much different
3. I hope I have given you reasons to place your faith in the Word of God, and it alone!
  - a. The whole counsel of God has been proclaimed!
  - b. We have all things pertaining to life and godliness!
  - c. The faith has been revealed once and for all!
  - d. The Scriptures can make us complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work!

And so in the words of the apostle Paul...

*“...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.” (Acts 20:32)*

# Issues Of Distinction

## The Purpose Of Baptism

### INTRODUCTION

1. In this series we have surveyed the following “issues of distinction”:
  - a. **The Existence Of God** - which differentiates between...
    - 1) Atheists and agnostics, who deny or question God’s existence
    - 2) Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc., who believe in a Supreme Being
  - b. **The Identity Of God** - which distinguishes between...
    - 1) Buddhists, Hindus, etc., who hold to many gods
    - 2) Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc., who believe in God of Abraham
  - c. **The Identity Of Jesus Of Nazareth** - over which there is a difference between...
    - 1) Jews, Moslems, etc., who may accept Jesus as a good man, perhaps a prophet
    - 2) Christians, who believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God
  - d. **The All-Sufficiency Of The Scriptures** - where again there is a difference between...
    - 1) Catholics, Mormons, JW’s, etc., who deny the Scriptures are all-sufficient
    - 2) Mainstream Protestants, Christians, etc., who profess the principle of “scriptura sola” (the Scriptures alone)
2. Another “issue of distinction” is **The Purpose Of Baptism..**
  - a. Some who say that the purpose of baptism has nothing to do with salvation
  - b. Others say that baptism is an integral part in God’s plan for saving man
3. In this study, we shall examine...
  - a. The common view of baptism held by many denominations
  - b. What the Scriptures themselves teach concerning baptism
  - c. What difference does it really make

[We begin with...]

### I. THE COMMON DENOMINATIONAL VIEW REGARDING BAPTISM

#### **A. BAPTISM HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SALVATION...**

1. The view expressed by many Baptists is a popular one:
  - a. **“Baptists believe that no one is subject for baptism till he is already saved.”**
  - b. **“We believe it is a positive command, enjoined upon the believing, saved soul, and is essential to true, loving obedience.”**
  - c. **“Baptists believe that the immersion of a believer is an open declaration to the world that such a one is dead to sin.”**
  - d. **“Again, the immersion is a proclamation to the world that we believe in Him who died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”**
  - e. **“So it is a proclamation of our belief that Christ arose from the dead...”**

-- What Baptists Believe And Why They Believe It, J. G. Bow

2. My purpose is not to single out Baptists (my maternal ancestors were Baptists)
  - a. Not all Baptists would agree with the above view (see comments below)
  - b. But it is indicative of most Baptists, and is held by many Protestants

## **B. THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE...**

1. Baptism is simply “a public declaration” of one’s faith in Jesus Christ
2. It is a command to be obeyed AFTER salvation, similar to the Lord’s Supper
3. It is therefore nonessential to salvation: **“Is baptism necessary for salvation? I don’t beat about the bush about it at all. I come out with a plain, definite NO! No, baptism doesn’t save, doesn’t help save, and I’ll go even further to say that it doesn’t have anything in this world to with the saving of a soul.”** Good News, Edward T. Hiscox, March 2, 1972

[Is this true? Is the only purpose of baptism one of making a public proclamation of one’s faith in Jesus? Is baptism for those who are already saved? Please prayerfully consider...]

## **II. THE BIBLICAL VIEW REGARDING BAPTISM**

### **A. IS BAPTISM “A PUBLIC PROCLAMATION ONE’S FAITH”...?**

1. There is no teaching in the Bible that defines the purpose for baptism as such
    - a. An appeal is often made to the example of Christ’s baptism...
      - 1) That Jesus was baptized to publicly introduce Himself to Israel as the Messiah
      - 2) And that therefore the purpose for Christian baptism is to serve a similar purpose; i.e., to publicly profess ourselves to the world as disciples of Jesus
    - b. An interesting correlation, but one nowhere made in the Scriptures!
  2. If baptism were solely a public proclamation of one’s faith...
    - a. What about the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch? - **Ac 8:35-39**
      - 1) When he asked what might hinder him from being baptized, why wasn’t he told to wait until they got to town or some public place?
      - 2) The fact that he was baptized when it was just he and Philip would imply that there is some other purpose for baptism!
    - b. What about the baptism of the Philippian jailer and his family? - **Ac 16:25-34**
      - 1) They were baptized “immediately”, after midnight and before daylight
      - 2) Why didn’t Paul tell them to wait until a special baptismal service could be held that was open to the public, or at least to the church?
  3. Both of these examples imply that the purpose of baptism is for some reason other than a public profession of one’s faith
    - a. There was a sense of urgency in both cases
    - b. Indeed, in every case where baptism is described in detail in the book of Acts, it occurs immediately after one lesson!
- **Whatever the purpose, it did not matter whether it was done in public or in private**

### **B. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT BAPTISM...**

1. When you are baptized into Christ, the Bible says:
  - a. You put on the Lord Jesus - **Ga 3:26-27**

- b. Your sins are washed away - **Ac 22:16**
  - c. Your sins are remitted (forgiven) - **Ac 2:38**
  - d. You die to sin and are freed from sin - **Ro 6:1-7**
  - e. You are baptized into the body of Christ - **1 Co 12:13**
  - f. You are saved through the resurrection of Christ, as you make an appeal for a good conscience - **1 Pe 3:21**
2. Here are some thought-provoking quotations from **George Beasley-Murray**, Baptist scholar, in his book, Baptism In The New Testament:
- a. **“In light of the foregoing exposition of the New Testament representations of baptism, the idea that baptism is a purely symbolic rite must be pronounced not alone unsatisfactory but out of harmony with the New Testament itself. Admittedly, such a judgment runs counter to the popular tradition of the Denomination to which the writer belongs...”**
  - b. **“The extent and nature of the grace which the New Testament writers declare to be present in baptism is astonishing for any who come to the study freshly with an open mind.”**
  - c. **“...the ‘grace’ available to man in baptism is said by the New Testament writers to include the following elements:**
    - 1) **forgiveness of sin, Ac 2.38 and cleansing from sins, Ac 22.16, 2 Co 6.11;**
    - 2) **union with Christ, Ga 3.27, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, Ro. 6.3ff, Co 2.11f, with all that implies of release from sin’s power, as well as guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, Ro 6.1-11;**
    - 3) **participation in Christ’s sonship, Ga 3.26f;**
    - 4) **consecration to God, 1 Co 6.11, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, 1 Co 12.13, Ga 3.27-29;**
    - 5) **possession of the Spirit, Ac 2.38, 1 Co 6.11, 12.13, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e., regeneration, Ti 3.5, Jn 3.5;**
    - 6) **grace to live according to the will of God, Ro 6.1ff, Co 3.1ff;**
    - 7) **deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, Co 1.13;**
    - 8) **the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, Jn 3.5, and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, Ep 1.3f, 4.30. (pp. 263-264)**
3. Yes, when one comes to the Bible with an open mind, willing to consider whatever the Bible says about baptism...
- a. They will conclude with **George Beasley-Murray** that the idea baptism is a purely symbolic rite:
    - 1) **Must be pronounced unsatisfactory!**
    - 2) **Is out of harmony with the New Testament itself!**
  - b. They will agree with **Martin Luther**, who...
    - 1) In answer to the question, **“What gifts or benefits does Baptism bestow?”**, replied in his Small Catechism, **“It effects forgiveness of sins.”**
    - 2) Also wrote concerning the sinner: **“Through Baptism he is bathed in the blood of Christ and is cleansed from sins.”**
    - 3) Again wrote: **“To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save.”** (as quoted by Jack W. Cottrell in Baptism And The Remission of Sins, College Press, 1990, p. 32-34)



- 4) In his commentary on **Ro 6:3**, wrote: **“Baptism has been instituted that it should lead us to the blessings (of this death) and through such death to eternal life. Therefore IT IS NECESSARY that we should be baptized into Jesus Christ and His death.”** (Commentary On Romans, Kregel Publications, p. 101)
- c. And they will concur with **Augustine**, who...
  - 1) Referring to the efficacy of baptism, wrote that **“the salvation of man is effected in baptism”**; also, that a person **“is baptized for the express purpose of being with Christ.”** (Cottrell, p. 30)
  - 2) With regard to the necessity of baptism, refers to the **“apostolic tradition, by which the Churches of Christ maintain it to be an inherent principle, that without baptism...it is impossible for any man to attain to salvation and everlasting life.”** (ibid., p. 30)

[Indeed, along with the perspective of church history, the Bible clearly teaches that the purpose of baptism is one that relates to the saving of one’s soul, for as one is baptized they are by God’s grace and power united with Christ and thereby receive all the benefits of His death!

If this be true, what are the ramifications? Does it really make any difference **why** one is baptized...?]

### **III. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?**

#### **A. SOME BOLDLY PROCLAIM IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE...**

1. That God will accept a baptism for a different purpose
2. That while a person may mistakenly think they were saved at the point of believing, their sins are forgiven at the point of baptism
3. Isn’t this rather presumptuous on our part?
  - a. To speak for God?
  - b. When the Bible does not say what He will or will not do in such cases?

#### **B. BUT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE...**

1. **At best**, it raises serious questions about one’s obedience to the gospel
  - a. Has one really obeyed Christ, if they responded to a perversion of it?
    - 1) Today, most people are told to simply repent and pray
    - 2) But the apostles commanded people to repent and be baptized - **Ac 2:38**
  - b. Can a person be taught wrong, and baptized right?
    - 1) In **Ac 19:1-5**, we have a case of re-baptism...
      - a) John’s baptism did not qualify as meeting the conditions of Christ’s baptism
      - b) Even though John’s baptism was the will of God for a short time
    - 2) If John’s baptism required re-baptism in the name of Christ, how much more those who were not baptized for the right purpose today?
2. **At worst**, there are some serious consequences!
  - a. People who sincerely think they are saved are still lost!
  - b. Preachers and teachers who say baptism has nothing to do with salvation are teaching a perverted gospel! - cf. **Ga 1:8-9**
3. **In any case**, it affect the way one preaches! Beasley-Murray again:

- a. “**First, there ought to be a greater endeavor to make baptism integral to the Gospel.**”
- b. “**It is taken as axiomatic amongst us [Baptists, MAC] that the proclamation of the Gospel consists of making the redemptive acts of God in Christ known and calling for faith in Christ as the due response; baptism is then a proper subject for exposition in the inquirers' class, along with instruction as to the nature of the Church, of worship, of Christian obligation in the Church and to the world, etc.**”
- c. “**Peter’s response, however, to the cry of his conscience stricken hearers on the Day of Pentecost was not “Repent and believe”, but “Repent and be baptized”! (Ac 2.38).**”
- d. “**Naturally faith was presumed in repentance, but Peter’s answer told the Jews how to become Christians: faith and repentance are to be expressed in baptism, and SO they are to come to the Lord.**”
- e. “**Baptism is here a part of the proclamation of Christ. In an Apostolic sermon it comes as its logical conclusion.**”
- f. “**An effort ought to be made to restore this note in our [Baptist] preaching.**”  
(Ibid., p. 393)

## CONCLUSION

1. To restore this note in one’s preaching will certainly make a difference!
  - a. Our response to the question “*What shall we do?*” will be similar to Peter’s response on Pentecost: “*Repent...and be baptized!*”
  - b. People will respond to our “*preaching Christ*” ask like the eunuch: “*Here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?*”
2. Yet today, rarely do you hear in many churches...
  - a. A preacher commanding his audience like Peter did in **Ac 2:38**
  - b. A listener who just heard a gospel lesson ask the question the eunuch did in **Ac 8:36**  
-- **The reason should be clear: Something’s changed!**
3. Yes, **The Purpose Of Baptism** is another “issue of distinction...
  - a. For one’s view on the purpose of baptism make a great difference
  - b. It affects our preaching, and it affects the souls of those who hear us!
4. We must therefore...
  - a. Fully understand the distinction between such views on baptism
  - b. Make certain that our understanding is in harmony with the Scriptures
  - c. Lovingly reach out to those who are in error

What is your understanding concerning baptism? Have you been baptized for the purpose revealed in the Scriptures?

# Issues Of Distinction

## The Nature Of The Lord's Church

### INTRODUCTION

1. In this series we have surveyed the following "issues of distinction":
  - a. **The Existence Of God** - which differentiates between...
    - 1) Atheists and agnostics, who deny or question God's existence
    - 2) Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, Christians, etc., who believe in a Supreme Being
  - b. **The Identity Of God** - which distinguishes between...
    - 1) Buddhists, Hindus, etc., who hold to many gods
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  - c. **The Identity Of Jesus Of Nazareth** - over which there is a difference between...
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  - d. **The All-Sufficiency Of The Scriptures** - where again there is a difference between...
    - 1) Catholics, Mormons, JW's, etc., who deny the Scriptures are all-sufficient
    - 2) Mainstream Protestants, Christians, etc., who profess the principle of "scriptura sola" (the Scriptures alone)
  - e. **The Purpose Of Baptism** - where there is a difference between...
    - 1) Those who proclaim that baptism has nothing to do with salvation
    - 2) Those who teach that baptism is an integral part of the gospel and God's plan for saving man in Christ
2. A final "issue of distinction" I would like to examine in this series is **The Nature Of The Lord's Church...**
  - a. This is not to say there are not other "issues of distinction"
  - b. For example, the Lord's Supper is certainly an issue that distinguishes those who have differing views concerning it
  - c. But for this particular series, this will be our last lesson
3. In this study, we shall examine...
  - a. The nature of the Lord's church as revealed in the Scriptures
  - b. The trend toward denominationalism, even among those who claim to be nondenominational churches of Christ
  - c. What is wrong with denominationalism and current trends leading toward it

[Let's begin, then, with...]

### I. THE NATURE OF THE LORD'S CHURCH AS REVEALED IN THE SCRIPTURES

#### **A. THE TERM "CHURCH" IS PRIMARILY USED IN TWO WAYS...**

1. In the **universal** sense
  - a. Referring to all the saved throughout the world

- b. Used this way in **Mt 16:18; Ep 5:23; Co 1:18**
- 2. In the **local** sense
  - a. Referring to the saved in one particular geographical locality
  - a. Used this way in **1 Co 1:2; Re 1:11; Ro 16:16**

## **B. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN “THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL” AND “THE CHURCH LOCAL”...**

- 1. In the **universal** sense:
  - a. There is **only one church** - **Ep 4:4**; compare with **Ep 1:22-23**
  - b. Christ is the head; individual Christians are members of His body - **1 Co 12:27**
  - c. There is **no earthly organization**; what organization there may be is spiritual in nature - **Ep 2:19-20**
  - d. The universal church never meets as such; it has no “officers” except Jesus Christ and the original apostles and prophets
- 2. In the **local** sense:
  - a. There are **many churches** - cf. **Ga 1:2**
  - b. There is to be **earthly organization** within each local church
    - 1) Ideally, each church has elders (also known as bishops, pastors) and deacons - e.g., **Ph 1:1**
    - 2) Although churches may exist temporarily until such men can be appointed - cf. **Ac 14:21-23**
  - c. Local churches meet regularly; and Christians have responsibilities in connection with their brethren in the local church

## **C. LOCAL CHURCHES WERE INDEPENDENT AND AUTONOMOUS...**

- 1. Each congregation was to submit to the oversight of its own elders - cf. **He 13:17**
    - a. Certainly they were also subject to the authority of Christ and His apostles
    - b. But no other church or human organization had any authority over them
  - 2. Elders had oversight only over the flock of God which was among them:
    - a. *“Shepherd the flock of God which is **among you...**”* - **1 Pe 5:2**
    - b. *“take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, **among which** the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...”* - **Ac 20:28**
- No elder or group of elders was appointed to be over two or more churches!**

[Such was the nature and pattern of the Lord’s church as found in the New Testament. With such simplicity the gospel spread and congregations were planted all over the Mediterranean world and beyond. But not long after the apostles died, the nature of the Lord’s church began to change, brought about by...]

## **II. THE TREND TOWARD DENOMINATIONALISM**

### **A. DEFINING “DENOMINATIONALISM”...**

- 1. Let’s first define **denomination**
  - a. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: **“A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.”**

- b. From Webster's: **“A religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations.”**
  - c. In simple terms, a denomination is a group of congregations that are joined together under some governing body...
    - 1) The number of congregations can be as few as two or more
    - 2) But by their tie to a governing body above the local congregation, by definition they are “denominated” from all congregations that do not submit to the same authority
  - d. Some examples:
    - 1) The Roman Catholic Church is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the pope in Rome
    - 2) The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) is made up of those churches that submit to the synod in Missouri
    - 3) The International Church of Christ is made up of those churches that submit to the Boston Church of Christ

-- These are just a few of the thousands of different denominations that now exist!
2. Now let's define **denominationalism**
- a. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, it is:
    - 1) **“The tendency to separate into religious denominations”**
    - 2) **“Advocacy of separation into religious denominations”**
    - 3) **“Strict adherence to a denomination; sectarianism”**
  - b. Again, Webster's dictionary defines it as:
    - 1) **“Devotion to denominational principles or interests”**
    - 2) **“Narrow emphasizing of denominational differences: Sectarianism”**
  - c. In this lesson, I am applying the term to any effort to create a collectivity of congregations in such a way as to denominate them from other churches

## **B. HOW DENOMINATIONALISM BEGAN IN THE SECOND CENTURY...**

- 1. It did not happen overnight, but through small, subtle changes in the organization of the Lord's church
- 2. The first step was a change from a two-tier system to a three-tier system
  - a. I.e., the early churches had elders (also known as bishops, pastors) and deacons
  - b. But then the title “bishop” came to be reserved for just one of the elders, creating a three-tier hierarchy of bishop-elders-deacons within a local congregation
- 3. The next change involved one bishop over many congregations
  - a. In the NT, there were a plurality of bishops over just one congregation
  - b. But now, there was one bishop over a plurality of congregations
- 4. Eventually this pattern of change led to the formation of various denominations
  - a. E.g., Roman Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Coptic, etc.
  - b. All depending upon which religious leader was recognized by a group of churches

## **C. HOW IT CONTINUES TODAY...**

- 1. **The Protestant Reformation did not really help matters that much**
  - a. While the reformers may have had the right idea, their followers often simply crystallized and formed denominations (in some cases, over the objections of the reformers themselves)
  - b. As denominations were formed, many of them divided even further, creating more

denominations

2. **Efforts to restore the New Testament pattern often went awry**
  - a. Some restoration movements started out by following the NT pattern
  - b. But as time passed, they slowly drifted into forming denominational structures
    - 1) E.g., many churches became the Christian Church-Disciples Of Christ denomination
    - 2) E.g., other churches became the International Church of Christ denomination
3. **I see this trend even among churches of Christ claiming to be nondenominational...**
  - a. By changing the nature of cooperation among local churches, they create a de facto denomination
  - b. This is especially manifested when the “sponsoring church” concept is adopted
    - 1) For by its very definition and in actuality, one church takes oversight of a work done by a collectivity of churches
    - 2) This “collectivity” of churches, under the oversight of the sponsoring church, has formed a denomination in practice, if not in name!

[I can imagine that some may be wondering, “What is so bad about that?” In other words...]

### **III. WHAT IS WRONG WITH DENOMINATIONALISM IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS?**

#### **A. FIRST, DENOMINATIONALISM IS UN-SCRIPTURAL...**

1. That is, it is without Scriptural support
2. We have seen that in the New Testament that...
  - a. Local congregations were independent, self-governing
  - b. Church organization was limited to within the local congregation, with elders (also known as pastors, bishops, overseers, presbyters) appointed to oversee only the congregation of which they were members - cf. **Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
3. The only authority above the local church was Christ and His apostles...
  - a. Once the church began, apostles were not replaced after they died
  - b. But through the Word of God, the authority of Christ and His apostles continues
4. Individuals, synods, conferences, sponsoring churches, etc., that presume to have oversight over local congregations do so without Scriptural authority

#### **B. SECOND, DENOMINATIONALISM IS ANTI-SCRIPTURAL...**

1. I.e., not only is it without scriptural support, it is contrary to what the Bible teaches
2. Denominationalism creates division, and division is:
  - a. Contrary to the prayer of Jesus for unity among His believers - **Jn 17:20-23**
  - b. Condemned by Paul in his epistle to the church at Corinth
    - 1) There are to be no divisions among believers - **1 Co 1:10-13**
    - 2) Sectarianism is a sign of carnality - **1 Co 3:3-4**

#### **C. THIRD, IT IS HARMFUL TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST...**

1. Jesus knew that unity among His disciples would be “the final apologetic”
  - a. Cf. **“that the world may believe” - Jn 17:21**
  - b. In view of Jesus’ words, we should not be surprised when unbelievers are slow to accept the gospel coming from a divided church
2. Many people point to the divided condition of those professing to follow Christ...

- a. Atheists and agnostics often use division as an excuse not to believe in God
- b. Adherents to non-Christian religions (such as Islam, Judaism, etc.) will often use denominationalism as a reason not to believe in Christ
3. Denominationalism has also given support and encouragement to the cults
  - a. Mormonism started in reaction to the denominationalism of Joseph Smith's day
  - b. Those who call themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses" use the religious division to encourage people to follow their strictly-controlled organization
4. It opposes the efforts of Christ on the cross! - **Ep 2:14-16**
  - a. Jesus died to break down the wall of division
  - b. Jesus died to reconcile man to God in ONE body
  - Just as sinning works against the efforts of Christ on the cross (for He also died to put away sin), so it is with denominational division!
5. It is harmful even in it's most subtle forms (e.g., the sponsoring church concept)
  - a. Churches that refuse to join in with some a congregation's desire to sponsor some "great work" are often ostracized
  - b. The change in church cooperation is a small one, but it is small steps away from the New Testament pattern that eventually lead to the creation of something totally different than what the Lord intended
    - 1) It happened in the second century A.D.
    - 2) It has happened time and again ever since, leading to the formation of more and more denominations!

## CONCLUSION

1. The nature of the Lord's church may not seem to be a significant issue...
  - a. Many would consider church organization and cooperation to be a matter of indifference
  - b. They would certainly not put it on the same level as **The Identity Of God** or **The Identity Of Jesus Of Nazareth**
2. Whether or not it belongs on the same level, it is worthy of our prayerful consideration...
  - a. History reveals that the departure from the New Testament pattern began with small changes in the organization of the church
  - b. History continues to reveal that this is often the first step toward apostasy time and again
  - **For when one disregards the New Testament concerning the nature of the Lord's church, it is not long before they disregard what else the New Testament has to say!**

It is my prayer, therefore, that we will always give careful heed to whatever the New Testament reveals concerning **The Nature Of The Lord's Church**, for it is truly an "issue of distinction"!