

## A PERSPECTIVE FROM CHURCH HISTORY

# The Roots of Diversity

Do you know how many denominations there are in the Church? Consider this. There are 27 Baptist denominations, 23 Methodist, 10 Presbyterian, 10 Brethren, 12 Lutheran, 12 Mennonite, 13 Pentacostal, 200 Churches of God, and countless others by a variety of names. This does not include all the independent churches of which there are nearly 100,000 independent Baptist churches, plus Bible Churches, Community Churches, and many other independent churches by various names. There are definite distinctions between each denomination and many more distinctions among the independents. Yet each uses the Bible and claims to believe the truth. Can there really be so much diversity within the truth?

Sectarianism goes back a long way. As a matter of fact, it began almost as soon as the church was born. Acts Chapter 15 records an official council which discussed one such division. In verse one of that chapter, "certain men taught the brethren" a particular doctrine. In verse two, "Paul and Bamabas had no small dissension and disputation with them." The council attempted to focus everyone on the truth.

Variations in Christianity was a great concern from the beginning of the Church as evidenced in Paul's letters. In Titus 1:11 some were "teaching things which they ought not," and Titus was to stop them from doing so. Likewise, Timothy was admonished to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). Dissension, however, reached such proportions that in the first 30 years of Christianity different Gospels could actually be identified as testified to in Galatians 1:6-7.

The concern, of course, was that the dividing of Christianity was occurring because of a departure from the truth. There really was not a flexibility in truth that allowed for so many differences to co-exist. When the truth was bent, it ceased to be truth. When truth was mixed with lies and grossly distorted, truth was changed and redefined, making it to be something other than the truth. Yet all the variations of the truth continued to claim identity with truth, even though they were contradictory in nature.

Multiply the process through nearly two thousand years. Today the church at large encourages a celebration of diversity as though that were something God intended to exist. This is hard to rectify though with the Scriptures that say, *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment* (1 Corinthians 1:10).

By the year 300 A.D. there were already at least 100 identifiable sects of Christianity. Later in the middle ages, when the Roman Catholic Church developed a monopoly within Christianity, little was settled regarding truth in the Church because of Catholicism's progressively changing dogma. When the Reformation burst upon Christendom, it opened a flood gate of sectarian theology. As a result, today "truth" is splintered into literally hundreds of thousands of diverse fragments. The search for truth in our day has become a staggering challenge.

In the following paragraphs, we will briefly examine the historical development of the church which has brought us to our schismatic present. Hopefully, this commentary on church

history will help us to understand how we have gotten where we are. Beyond that, it is imperative that we gain a confidence in being able to sort out the real truth from the maze of doctrinal diversity in the church.

O, yes! The truth still exists in its pure form. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). May our vision of Him take on a clearer focus in the following thoughts.

## **I. Diversity From The Beginning**

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." All those who receive Jesus into their lives receive the author of truth. They become part of his spiritual body and stewards of the truth which He proclaims (1 Timothy 3:15). It is sad, however, to observe how so many who claim to be attached to the truth can be so diverse in their understanding of it. This diversity began long ago.

The adolescent church (A.D. 50-500) struggled to develop a sense of maturity. The Roman philosophy was that everything revolved around the state, including religion. Patriotism was number one in the Roman mind set. If a religion dissuaded its adherents from loyalty to the state, the religion was wrong. On the other hand, the church believed that all life revolved around its Saviour.

Loyalty to God was number one in the Christian mind set. If a government forced its citizens to violate their Biblical convictions, then the government was wrong. This conflict produced a pseudo unity among believers in the early church as they all commonly suffered under state sponsored persecution. Even though definite differences were growing among believers, they did not gain much attention because of the conflict Christians shared. However, the dissension in these years laid the foundation for the splintering of the church later.

In those first few centuries there were sound men of the faith. Clement, one of the first Bishops in Rome, wrote letters of exhortation to other churches. Ignatius (100-150 A.D.) was arrested for his faith and sent to Rome to die in the Arena. Polycarp (70-155 A.D.) had originally been a disciple of John. At age 86 he refused to deny Christ and was burned at the stake.

There were others who were part of mainline Christianity but held different ideas. For example, Origen (185-250), who is considered one of the church fathers, allegorized Scripture and argued heavily against literal interpretation. He believed that Christianity was a philosophy that was buttressed with Scripture but rested on reason. He contributed greatly to the fragmenting of the church.

Then there were those who were obviously of a non-Christian persuasion yet claimed to be Christian. Mani (216-276) believed perfection was the possession of pure light. Anything related to the material world was darkness. He promoted celibacy for all. Montanus believed that inspiration was immediate and continuous and therefore the Bible was incomplete. Two women of his group monitored doctrine through trances. Marcion believed that there were two Gods in the Bible. The Old Testament God was bad and the New Testament God was good. The Docetists believed Christ's body was a phantom and that he had no real human flesh.

On and on we could relate the increasingly more bazaar ideas of "Christians" even in the very early days. This really is not a modern problem. Yet always, as God promises, He preserves a remnant. As he says in Romans 11:5, *Even so then at this present time also there*

*is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

## **2. Hiding The Truth**

By the year 300 A.D., the political attachment to paganism had died out in the Roman Empire. Philosophy among Roman Aristocracy helped to kill it and Christianity compounded the effort. However, the form of pagan religion remained with many temples still in technical operation.

Politically, the Empire was weakening. Diocletian had organized the Empire but created such a bureaucracy that it did not provide a sufficient foundation for continuing stability. A cleavage between the East and West segments grew in intensity.

In an effort to draw the Romans back into a glorious union, Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the State. It was the type of relationship familiar to the Empire. The affairs of the throne and Senate were extensively interrelated with those of the temples to Roman gods. However, as the state weakened, it became increasingly more dependent upon the growing Church. Making Christianity the official state religion was supposed to help the Empire. What actually happened was that the Church absorbed the State and became the dominant factor of European history for centuries to come.

It may appear that this is just where the church wanted to be. As masters of Europe it could witness for Christ without restraint. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Power and prosperity were detrimental to the growth of true spirituality. The Church of the Roman Empire had the opportunity to focus everyone on the truth. It had the wealth, the education, and the available means to teach all its citizens the Word of God. The potential was unlimited. And so it is hard to believe what actually happened. Instead of freely giving out God's precious Word, the Ecclesiastical hierarchy closeted all the manuscripts of Scripture into Monasteries and Cathedrals and prevented all but a few isolated Monks and Priests from knowing anything about it. After hundreds of years of the truth being distorted, something worse occurred—it was hidden altogether.

## **3. Institutionalizing the “Truth”**

The course of church history followed a definite pattern. In its infancy, the church had many new things to learn about itself. As it grew and developed

developed through the second and third centuries, the church went through an adolescence during which there were many internal and external conflicts. When the church finally came of age as the state religion of the Roman Empire, there were many good things. There were strong leaders committed to Biblical excellence and an unprecedented opportunity to influence the whole European and Middle Eastern world with no strings attached.

There seems to be, however, an unfortunate pattern in any group or organization. When it becomes established and resistance is all but eliminated, perspective is easily lost, and an institutionalization can set in which causes stagnation. This is exactly what happened to the church. Its leaders became so intoxicated with their ability to influence that they translated this into political power, rather than evangelistic influence. In 800 A.D. the Bishop of Rome laid the crown upon the head of Charlemagne and thus established the supremacy of the church over the state. During the next 600 years there would be a dramatic struggle between prelate and

noble to determine who had the right to grant existence to the other. (There are still elements of this conflict evident in our American society.)

The church, with the assistance of feudalism, put European society to sleep. Education took place only inside monastery walls. The activities of nobles consisted primarily of fighting each other or resisting invasion from the North. Life expectancy was about 35 to 40 and little changed in the way people lived from 600 A.D. to 1200 A.D.

#### **4. Fighting For Survival**

When one reflects upon these dark years, he may wonder what can be learned from such a time. How could God allow such corruption and complete deviation from what He intended? How could He tolerate the unethical and immoral behavior of those who were responsible for his spiritual body on earth?

Here is where we need to develop a deeper appreciation for the mercies of God. When Scripture says that God is not slack concerning his promise but is longsuffering to us-ward, the word long is suspended in a time warp that allows God to be extremely tolerant of our foolishness. During that time warp He spends unlimited energy in an attempt to bring us to our knees and to a renewed understanding of the truth.

In God's mercy, this is just what he did with the Church. He created a just cause in which it could struggle in the Crusades and rediscover its dependency upon God. He opened the eyes of faithful men and gave them the courage to stand for truth – in many cases at the expense of their own earthly lives. He awakened the human soul to the reality of sin and death and hell and brought conviction that generated a confession and reception of salvation through justification by faith.

The Crusades are one of the most curious aspects of Church History. They consisted of military invasions conducted by European Kings and nobles against the Moslems occupying the Holy Land. The participants of the Crusades never fulfilled their original purpose, to liberate the Land of Israel from Moslem domination. However, something of far greater significance resulted from this 275 year campaign. Instead of preserving medieval Christianity in the land of Palestine, the buttresses of this form of Christianity were completely knocked down and the political and spiritual personality of Europe was totally transformed.

Militarism was the sum total of European political thought through the dark ages. Chivalry would come later, but in A.D. 1000, knights sang more love songs to their swords than they did to their ladies. The leader of the church, Urban, thought it wise to direct this aggression toward an outside subject before Europe lay in total ruin from constant in-fighting. The Moslems had been a threat to European security for several hundred years. They would be the logical target. Urban created such enthusiasm for the cause that in 1096 A.D. a large mass of peasants marched from France to Palestine, poorly armed and poorly organized. The group was brutally massacred by the Moslems. While there were some military victories for the crusaders later on, this first failure represents the haphazard manner in which most of the Crusade campaigns were conducted.

There were many consequences of the Crusades. One of them, however, was more of a blessing than a problem. While Europe had been intellectually dark for more than half a millennium, the middle east and northern Africa prospered. The Christian soldiers from England, France, Germany and Italy were exposed to this advanced culture during the Crusades and the

European human soul was awakened by it.

In the appearance of things, the Christians soldiers of the Crusades fought against the Moslems. But in the heart of these enduring campaigns, they fought just as much against their own enslavement to feudalism. The church had become just as intensely feudalistic as European society was. A personal relationship with Christ was hidden in the shadows of a history largely unknown to us today. Everyone who called himself a Christian in Europe was held subservient to religious lords who neither knew Christ nor cared if anyone else did. But once the human soul was awakened, it realized that there must be more to the Christian experience. The stage was silently set for the birth of men like Peter Waldo, John Huss, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther. Through these and others, truth would be rediscovered and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through faith alone would be returned to the people.

We Christians today take this freedom for granted. This freedom to exercise faith in God alone, apart from ritual, penance and indulgence, is far more precious than we realize. The Holy Scriptures say, *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*, and whosoever will may come (Ephesians 2:8-9; Revelation 22:17).


### Conclusion

No matter what men attempt to do with God's truth, whether they change it, bend it, distort it, or hide it, it will always resurface in clarity and power. When the truth finally re-emerged again many hundreds of years later, there came with it a renewed conviction of the sinfulness of man's heart and his need to be saved through faith in the Gospel of Christ.

God has declared that His Word is alive. Men will never be able to affect it, but it will always effect men. It will dissect and convict and then heal. God's Word, the Truth, is deserving of our faith. Let us give ourselves to the Truth without reservation, and allow its full effect to impact our lives.

By knowing what those who have gone before us have had to endure, let us learn to appreciate the blessing each of us possesses in our personal relationship with the Saviour. Let us not fail, by neglect, to show Christ our appreciation. Show Him by walking with him faithfully every day. Praise God we can know that we are saved. Praise that there have always been those who have known that they were saved. Praise God that the truth has been preserved through all the turmoil of church history. It is preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures. Let us not allow our hearts to wander from it.

While we look at the history of the church as a movement, we may also look at the movement of our own lives through stages of development. Being honest with ourselves we will be able to identify dark days in which we have been less than faithful. But for the mercy of God, where would we be. Before we give up on those who are going through dark spiritual days in their lives, let us remember the long night of the institutionalized Church and let us remember the bleakness of our own experience. In each case remember also that God did not leave us, nor forsake His church but in time brought hope, and joy, and life through faith. Let us allow ourselves to be the instruments that God may use to bring these things to others.

(Next month we will continue these thoughts into the time of the Reformation.) 

## Counting Our Blessings

Counting our blessings is good practice.

1. It makes us get along with people better.
2. It makes us look around us instead of within us.
3. It makes us more considerate, sympathetic.
4. It causes us to live for others, not ourselves.
5. It makes us a blessing instead of a burden.
6. It corrects our perspective of life.
7. It strengthens our inner resources of faith and hope.
8. It increases our confidence for living.
9. It increases our awareness of God.

## The Branches of Diversity

*(Last month we began this subject with an article entitled "The Roots of Diversity." In that article we considered the roots of diversity in church history up through the time of the Crusades. In this article we complete the thought from the time of the Reformation through the present.)*

Last month we considered some thoughts from Church History regarding the roots of diversity. Those roots came from the very beginning of the Church when men who called themselves Christians took many different paths of doctrinal persuasion. One would think that the natural result of this would have been the prevalence of denominationalism very early in the history of the church. In fact, the opposite occurred. A powerful centralized authority suppressed sectarianism among Christians and brought most of the active church under one "roof" – The Roman Catholic Church.

Again, one would think that the influence of one, unified, strong church would stabilize church doctrine and bring a period of unprecedented enlightenment to the world. However, with the institutionalization of the church came also a stagnation of spirituality and a progressive departure from sound biblical doctrine. Through the period of the dark ages, there were not many denominations diverse from one another, but the centralized Roman Church became increasingly diverse within itself from biblical truth. For example, it was in 593 A.D. that the church declared purgatory to be an official doctrine. In 754 A.D. the Pope claimed the right of civil authority in Italy as well as ecclesiastical authority. In 847 A.D., forged documents were used to establish the authority of bishops. This included such things as 72 witnesses being required to condemn a bishop, immunity from prosecution for bishops before secular tribunals, and the prohibition of a cleric from ever bringing an accusation against his superior in the church. In 858 A.D., the bishop of Rome as successor of Peter was established as having authority over all the bishops in the world. He was also given the right to wear an imperial crown and a purple cloak. In 1075 A.D., all marriages of the clergy were declared invalid and all preachers were required to divorce their wives. In 1100 A.D., the practice was established of giving money to a priest for the performance of a mass on behalf of individuals. By the time of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the authority of the Bible had been replaced with the authority of church tradition and the infallibility of the Pope. Justification by faith had been

replaced with salvation by works. Transubstantiation, the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, replaced the finished work of Christ. Confession to men replaced confession directly to God. The veneration of saints and the adoration of relics replaced the invisible Spirit. And, ceremony replaced the sermon. It was inevitable that there would eventually be a reaction against such ecclesiastical and theological corruption. That reaction came in the form of the reformation. Unfortunately, the reformation did not only result in freeing men's souls from the bondage of Catholicism, but also further contributed to the diversification of doctrinal beliefs.

### **1. Events Leading Up To The Reformation**

The nations of Europe for many hundreds of years were fragmented feudalistic lands. They did not exist in well defined countries as we know them today. As the Crusades intensified and waned, the influence Europeans received from their encounter with the east led the French, German, Italian, Spanish, and English people to develop a sense of nationalism and submit themselves to centralized governments. This political break from the Holy Roman Empire encouraged the Europeans to nationalize their religion as well. As native-son Churchmen began to speak independently of the church in Rome, many found guaranteed protection by their King and compatriots. Along with the political influence of the east came an exposure to culture that had been hidden from Europeans for centuries. The revival of culture in Europe during the period before the reformation became known as the Renaissance. In southern Europe, primarily in Italy, this was expressed through a revival of the arts. In northern Europe, it was expressed more in the revival of literature and language. The ancient manuscripts of the Greek and Hebrew Bible were brought out of their closets and studied directly, giving renewed insight into biblical truth. Then came the printing press. With this amazing invention, came the innovative idea of translating the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew directly into the language of the people and giving the average man an opportunity to read the Bible for himself.

The Renaissance was accompanied with another important movement – The Age of Reason. For centuries, the masses were discouraged from thinking for themselves. They were told that a blind faith in the teachings of the church was all they needed. But as nationalism spread, culture was revived, and a new middle class of skilled workers began to emerge, education and free thinking also found a renewed place in the human soul. This meant that men no longer simply accepted what the Roman Catholic Church Priests taught them, but they began to think and meditate upon the Word of God directly which resulted in a widespread transformation of men's faith.

Other reasons for the Reformation were both practical and doctrinal. In light of the requirement for clerical celibacy, there were excesses of immorality among the priests. This made the Church unbelievable. Indulgences had become church taxes which were draining local monies from newly formed European national treasuries. By the time people paid the Church, they had nothing left for the King. This broke a sense of allegiance to the church and a rechanneling of resources to local civil government. Then, when the printing press made the Scriptures available to many people who never before had seen them personally, people were no longer dependent upon the official Church to tell them what the Bible was saying. The Word of God did its work in their hearts and changed their lives and the course of religious history.

The lesson of the Reformation is a simple one. Only the Word of God gives life and

hope and peace to men. Organizations and men's traditions are only useful when they are servants of God's Word. Tradition which supercedes the Word of God is dangerous. "Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered and many such like things do ye" (Mark 7:9-13). But when a man's heart is exposed to the actual words of Scripture, it is inevitable that a dynamic impact and change occur. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16-17).

The Scriptures are clear. Let them speak to our hearts. May we learn from those who broke from the cocoon of darkness and realized first hand the wonderful impact of God's Word.

## **2. The Men Of The Reformation**

In the Reformation, personalities stand out just as strongly as doctrine. There were Luther and Menno Simons in Germany, Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland, and John Knox in Scotland, among many others. Of all the eras since Christ, the 16th Century has been perhaps the most saturated by great human minds. What makes these men so outstanding that the vibrations from their lives can still be felt four hundred and fifty years later?

For one thing, they were all sincere in their desire to know the truth. Each man mentioned above was a priest or monk in the established church of his day. They studied in the Seminaries (universities) and were taught the "accepted" theology. For many hundreds of years, the infallibility of Church doctrine stood unchallenged. But in the hearts of these men and others arose the conviction that Scripture was superior to organization and man-made policy. They adopted as their motto the declaration of Christ, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Luther was freed from ascetic bondage in realizing "the just shall live by faith". Menno Simons was freed from the loneliness of a monastery by realizing the importance of genuine spiritual fellowship. John Knox experienced the joy of revival as he learned to preach dynamically and to centralize the Word of God in the ministry. All of the Reformers were victorious because they were willing to stand alone for the truth when necessary.

Unfortunately, their efforts at rescuing the church from doctrinal corruption were less than perfect. Instead of pooling their energies in the rediscovery of biblical truth, they often viewed each other as competitors and allowed their disagreements to keep them apart. Consequently, when much of the church was freed from Roman Catholic doctrinal divergence, it did not simply return to the truth, but splintered into multiple variations, and the diversity that was rooted in the beginning of the church came to full bloom in the Reformation and its aftermath.

For example, Martin Luther not only taught justification by faith, but also taught consubstantiation – a variation from the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, in which Luther said that the elements of communion maintained their natural substance, but the presence of Christ in the elements was none the less very real and grace was obtained in partaking of them. John Calvin defined the doctrines of election and predestination to mean that man had no choice in his salvation, but that the sovereign God made that choice for him in that Christ died only for the elect who were selected by God Himself before the foundation of the world. The



rest of mankind had no hope of being saved since Christ did not die for them. Jacob Arminius countered with the teaching that salvation was so much by the free will of man that man's wayward will could also cause him to lose his salvation. Zwingli became a passionate militant who actually led Protestants in military battles and died from wounds received in one such venture. Menno Simons on the other hand encouraged passivism and nonviolence even when personally attacked. He also taught that material possessions were dangerous, leading his followers into a plain and humble lifestyle free of personal adornments.

### **3. Circumstances Following The Reformation**

The Reformation did restore the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. But what happened after the dust settled from the great struggle required to bring about reformation to church? The two key words of Church History since the Reformation are "diversity" and "divergence."

Because the Reformation involved several outstanding personalities spread over a politically fragmented European Continent, the reforming effect was one of great diversity. Diversity has always been part of the experience of the Body of Christ. In diversity there can be unity through balance. However, diversity can easily be translated into divergence. Diversity gave men of different personalities to the church such as Paul and Peter and Apollos. But as in the church at Corinth, the personalities of these men became catalysts to divergence – a drawing apart which has the potential of resulting in corrupting change. The book of 1 Corinthians was written to prevent such a thing from happening. It helped in the first century, but not in the 16<sup>th</sup> century or since. In Germany there were the Lutherans and Anabaptists. In Switzerland there were the Presbyterians. In Great Britain there were the Anglicans, Puritans and Separatists which respectively correspond to the American Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Baptists. At first, these various groups portrayed what appeared to be a healthy diversity in the church. From this, however, there continued to be an unrelenting fragmentation and unfortunate divergence from the truth.

From John Calvin and the Reformed Movement came the Presbyterians, the Scottish Reformed, the Dutch Reformed, the Swiss Reformed and the Congregationalists. In future generations of these Reformed Churches have come such groups as the Bible Presbyterian, the Churches of Christ, the Church of God, and the United Church of Christ, from which also came the Unitarians.

From the Anabaptists came the Mennonites, the Amish, the Brethren in Christ, the Moravians, the Church of the Brethren and in some degree the Seventh Day Adventists.

From Lutheranism has come several Lutheran denominations and the Evangelical Free Church.

From Anglicanism (the Church of England) has come Plymouth Brethren, Protestant Episcopalians, and Methodists. From the Methodists has come the Wesle

Wesleyan Church, the Salvation Army, the Church of God in Christ, the Church of the Nazarene, and the entire Pentecostal and Holiness movements.

From the original four or five major groups that emerged out of the Reformation, there have been the beginning of so many denominations and independent churches that it is almost impossible to keep track of them all, or to decipher all of the diversity of doctrinal persuasions that have resulted.

Several factors influenced this course of events. After each of the major Reformation participants settled into their own habits and liturgical philosophy, they developed a comfortableness that caused them to lose a sense of appreciation for redemption. In society there emerged a movement of "Rationalism" which only served to discredit the spiritual reality of faith. Consequently, those who practice the most involved religious rituals today seem to have a very low level of consciousness of the holiness of God and the redemptive value

of Jesus Christ.

There are lessons to be learned from the history of the Church. Diversity is good. Divergence is bad. Diversity provides balance. Divergence destroys the purity of true Christianity. In our own local church we must recognize the value of diversity, similar to that of Paul and Apollos and Cephas in 1 Corinthians. In spite of all their differences, they contributed equally to the production of real fruit in men's lives. But in our own local church there is no room for divergence. There is no room for encouraging specialized groups which will dwell upon some corrupted or exaggerated notion that moves people away from the purity of God's Word and the reality of Christ. There is no room for setting the ideas of man above the wisdom of God. There is no room for false doctrine or foolish questions or foolish genealogies or perverse disputings of men. Scripture says, "O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (I Tim. 6:11).

The Church is not divided into micro-groups because of wholesome diversity but because of carnal divergence from the truth. Again Scripture says, "for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (I Cor. 3:3).

We can be different in the unique character development that God gives to each of us. That kind of diversity can provide a wonderful balance to the Church and its program. Simply being different does not require division. However, when our differences are defined by divergence from the truth we have a horse of a different color. The purity of Christ and His righteousness must never be compromised through conflicting views of the truth.

### **Conclusion**

Can the Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century learn any lessons from the divergent paths of the church throughout its history? It should. Once again we have fallen into a complacency of accepting what is fed us without personally verifying its veracity. Too many professing Christians are just listening to the preaching of others through sermons and books and music and not investigating the Word themselves. It is so easy to believe that modern day Christianity has been successful in defining theological truth once and for all. But such complacency prevents us from appreciating the necessity to personally study the Scriptures and discover the truth for ourselves. We say, "why reinvent the wheel?" The danger is that such apathy towards personal Bible study may result in another dark ages in which the average Christian not only does not study the Bible, but does not know how to do so.

While there are many things in life that are contagious, that is, involuntarily transferred from one individual to another, truth is not. It must be purposely ingested by each individual for its effects to be experienced. II Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to show THYSELF approved." There are many communicable diseases. For example, our society is at present bracing against the dreaded Aids for which there is apparently no cure. But the disease can be passed from one person to another. No one seeks such a disease, but many become its victims. Would to God that we could be the victims of Truth. It would be so much easier that way. Unfortunately, we can never possess the truth against our will or obtain it without seeking it. We must pursue the truth with a passion and actively submit ourselves to God so that His Holy Spirit may guide us into all truth.

May we prevent the corruption of truth and the need for another Reformation by confirming the Truth through our own personal investigation of God's Word. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

The wonderful thing about finding the truth is that when we do, we will also find other believers with whom we will be in perfect harmony. In the truth, there is no diversity. It is absolute and unchangeable. Therefore, when many people come to the same truth, they come together and are joined in an unbreakable unity. In that unity, we may find a marvelous diversity

of personalities and people from many varied backgrounds. But the truth will bring a shared sameness to our hearts that will reflect the glory of God Himself. 📖