

A Brief Look at the Denominations and Movements within Biblical Christianity Today

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Preface

Many true Christians today are often very confused about all of the various denominations and movements within the present church. They often don't understand why there are so many and what the differences are between all of them. Further, they often don't know which churches to accept as their brothers and sisters in Christ, and which ones need us to preach the gospel to them. Obviously, as I make clear in the third book of my "basics" series, all true Christians need to be reminded of the gospel everyday. And pastors must preach this reminding on a regular basis, if not in every sermon to some extent. But this reminder, even when it is done in a preaching format, is not the same thing as preaching the gospel in an official sense. That is for unbelievers alone. And it is imperative we know who we are to preach the gospel to and who we are to fellowship with as fellow believers in the one true Jesus. This book is written to help clear all of this up.

I recommend reading my “basics” series before diving into this work in order to have a solid background regarding the primary doctrines of the Bible. It can be found on my website. I also recommend reading my book on the religions of the world and my book on church history down the line after you have wrapped up this book. They will provide you with even more context for what will be discussed in this work. They can both be found on my website. For further resources on the topics found in this work, they can be found in my book *A False Kind of Christianity*. It also can be found on my website. At the end of that work, I provide an extensive bibliography. As part of that bibliography, I provide a number of resources on church history that will give you a great deal more information on the history and teachings of all that will be covered in this work if you require that information.

The last thing I would like to address in this preface before giving people the chance to receive Jesus if they have not done so, is the fact that I will be using a lot of labels in this book. If you have a strong aversion to labels being put on people as so many Americans do today, I recommend reading my essay “Addressing Heresy.” It can be found on my website. Now, after reading that work you may say, “Ok, I can reluctantly admit that from a biblical perspective there is no way to avoid using labels for groups that falsely call themselves ‘Christian.’ But, I fail to see why we need to use them of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.” The problem is, with the utmost respect, this attitude is unfortunately every bit as unbiblical and Postmodern as the view that says that we should not use labels for the false “Christian” groups.

The fact of the matter is that the various churches during the Age of the Apostles were all labeled, they each had their own theological distinctives, and they are all judged by those distinctives. Most of the churches were split up according to geography and that is very different from today, but that doesn’t change the basic principle I just laid out. There were undoubtedly many individual Christians within these various churches that went against the theological distinctives of their church. The same is true today. Some probably even went so far as to move to another church because of these theological disagreements. But, for the most part, what I have said above was basically the case. In that sense, the church was very similar to the church today and throughout

church history. For a biblical defense of all that I've said, see all of Paul's epistles (with the exceptions of 1 Timothy-Philemon), and Revelation 2-3.

Finally, if you have never received Jesus as your God and Savior, please do so now. You do not know what can happen even in the next few moments, and so there is no time to wait. If you are not ready at this time, but become ready at any time you are reading through this book, please return to this section and receive Him. When you are ready, pray the prayer below sincerely from your heart and you will become a true Christian. It is very, very important to understand that merely saying the words of this prayer will not save you. There is no ritual, whether it be a prayer or anything else, that saves us. You must actually and sincerely mean these words or they will be of no help to you.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that you are God Almighty and the only Savior. I recognize that I am a sinner and I have come to hate my sin. I ask that you come into my life so that I can have an eternal relationship with you, your Father, and your Spirit. I ask that you forgive all of my sins based on what you did on the cross and through your bodily resurrection from the dead. I ask that you cover me with your righteousness. I ask that you give me your Spirit so that you will become number one in my life, far above all else, and so that I will be completely changed. I want to live my life for you from now on, and I can only do that through your Spirit. I understand that I will continue to sin until I die or you come back, so please give me the strength through your Spirit to always seek your help and to continue to ask for your forgiveness. I now know I will spend all eternity with you. I now love you and worship you, and I am so thankful and grateful to you for saving me. Amen.”

Chapter 1: Breaking Down the Church

Most Christians are fairly disheartened by how many various groups there are within the true church. It can often seem like we are horribly divided as Christians. While there is far too much division in the church, and there are certainly some teachers who

foster this division far more than they should, overall the church is not nearly as divided as people, both true Christians and unbelievers, think. As odd as it sounds at first, God actually doesn't like for His people to be too united as that leads to uniformity. When organizations have a top-down overly controlled system, it leads to tyranny. And the church is no different. The religions in the world that tend to be the most united (as good as that may sound at first), also tend to be the most tyrannical. God broke the Old Testament people down into 12 tribes. And these tribes were further broken down into clans. Each tribe and each clan had to follow the overall law of God as laid down in the Scriptures, but each tribe and clan was free to govern themselves in different ways beyond those basic laws. And there was to be no king either. A king was only instituted later by God as a punishment for the Israelites' demand for a king.

The same was true for the early church. Each church had to obey the Scriptures and the apostles, but beyond that each was free to govern itself as it saw fit on matters that specifically applied to their church. That may sound like an odd statement coming from someone that believes in denominations. But, I believe that while denominations are biblical, each church must freely choose which denomination to join. I reject any doctrine where a denomination has greater control than the individual church as being terribly unbiblical.

The same reality has always existed throughout church history. In the Eastern church, things were broken up primarily according to geography. This practice was carried over into Eastern Orthodoxy and is why that religion is broken up into the Russian Orthodox Church; the Romanian Orthodox Church; the Greek Orthodox Church; and the Serbian Orthodox Church (there are even smaller churches than these, but these are the primary four). All of these groups have differing doctrines and practices over secondary matters within the religion of Eastern Orthodoxy. In the Western church, eventually things were broken up according to the various monastic orders. This happened later in church history, and this organization was less official, but the monastic orders all had differing doctrines and practices concerning secondary matters. And most of the leaders in the rest of the church that were not part of a monastic order, tended to choose the theology of a specific order that made the most sense to them. Now it is true that in both the Eastern and Western churches, these

various groups were all united in an organizational sense in a far more official manner than was later the case with Protestantism. It is still noteworthy though, that they did have these subgroups.

Protestantism, which later flowed into Evangelicalism, which later flowed into the Conservative Evangelicalism of today, also had its primary groups. And the same is true for Conservative Evangelicalism (the true church today) currently. Conservative Evangelicalism is broken up into 10 primary overarching groups. 10 might sound like a lot at first, but when we look at things more closely, it really isn't that big of a deal. All religions have differences within them. Islam, for example, is broken up into 4 primary groups. They are: 1.) Sunni; 2.) Shia; 3.) Khawarij; and 4.) Sufi. And each of these can be broken up into smaller subgroups. Roman Catholicism, which loves to praise itself as being so much more united than Conservative Evangelicalism, is actually broken up into a number of different groups as well. It is broken up into two primary overarching groups. These are the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches (not to be confused with Eastern Orthodoxy). And the Eastern Catholic Churches are broken up into 5 subgroups. All of those 5 are then broken up into further subgroups. One of the 5, the Byzantine Rite, is broken up into 15 further subgroups. Hinduism is broken up into a wide array of subgroups and schools of thought. And Buddhism is broken up into 3 primary types. But those 3 types are often broken down even further.

It should also be noted that a number of the 10 groups of Conservative Evangelicalism are extremely similar. As we will see later in this work, the Confessional Continental Reformed Churches, Confessional Presbyterianism, and Confessional Congregationalism, are all very similar. Further, the Confessional Baptists and the Confessional Independent Bible Churches are also very similar for the most part. Even further, Confessional Pentecostalism and the Confessional Charismatic Churches are also very, very similar. If those subgroups were combined as overarching groups, and some Conservative Evangelicals have argued for classifying things in this manner, the true church today would only be made up of 6 overarching groups. I still think the number 10 classification is the most accurate, but all of this is still very worthy of note.

With all of that laid out, we can now discuss the differences between branches, denominations, movements, and schools of thought. In order to emphasize the actual

unity of the church, I believe that it is best to call the 10 overarching groups in the church today *branches*. The church is the body of Christ. All true Christians are united to Him. The Bible often also uses the imagery of a vine and branches to describe the people of God. Now, that imagery usually uses the idea of branches to describe individual Christians, but I think we can also look at the 10 overarching groups as forming the main branches, with the denominations and movements sprouting as smaller branches from the main ones, then individual churches sprouting as even smaller branches from those, and then individual Christians sprouting as the smallest branches from those. That is in fact how most trees and bushes and vines actually function. Even though I consider the denominations and movements to be sub-branches on the Christian tree, I will for the most part only use the term *branch* to describe the 10 primary groups.

A denomination is a group of religious people that are joined together in an official organization. Most religions have denominations of some sort, but denominations historically have been most associated with Protestantism because of its lack of formal organization over the entire religion or worldview. With all that said, the term is generally used in the true church to describe organizations that are made up specifically of churches. And that is how I am using the term in this work. There are Christian organizations that are made up of churches; Christian schools; other smaller Christian organizations; Christian individuals; or some combination thereof; or some other type of combination. For instance, ACSI is a true Christian organization that aims to help true Christian schools with education, accreditation, hiring of teachers, etc. But, most would not call it a denomination as it is mostly made up of Christian schools. There are true denominations and false ones. Here we are only concerned with the true denominations in the world. And by *true*, I am referring to the Bible-believing ones.

Each of the 10 groups are split up into multiple denominations with the exception of the Confessional Independent Bible Churches branch. These denominations each have their own unique doctrinal positions and practices, but are still united on certain broader doctrines and practices of the overall branch that they are under. And within each of these denominations, each individual church is allowed freedom on a number of issues, but they do agree to abide by the doctrines and practices of their denomination.

And within each church, a lot of freedom is allowed to individual Christians over many matters. If a church starts to try to tell you what time your kids should go to bed and/or other matters of this nature, that is a legalistic church and you should leave that church. Many churches allow for individual Christians to join the individual churches in the denomination even if the individual Christians do not agree with everything the denomination teaches and practices. As long as the individual Christians are orthodox overall and do not seek to create waves within the denomination, they are welcome to join. Most of these denominations will usually not allow such Christians to hold leadership positions within their churches. Some denominations do require that individual members hold to the beliefs and practices of the denomination though.

Apostate churches are those that do not keep their oath to abide. Now, if a church starts to change its mind on certain matters that are not essential to Christianity, that is fine. But in such cases, they need to make the denomination aware of this and if it gets to the point where they can no longer in good conscience continue to be a part of their denomination, they should leave in peace. Many churches refuse to do this and seek to corrupt their denomination with heresies from within.

A *movement* in the church, as I am using the term, is when a number of churches band together in an informal manner around shared doctrines, practices, and concerns. For instance, when the Calvary Chapel movement first started, it was made up of churches that were not formally organized together. But, they shared the same basic vision of Chuck Smith, the founder of the movement. At this time, the movement was merely a movement and was part of the Confessional Independent Bible Churches branch. Later though, the movement formally organized. Now they still did not want to be known as a denomination and are still often called a movement today, but for all practical purposes they became a denomination.

Sometimes movements start from within an existing denomination. For example, the Puritans were originally part of the Anglican Church. They saw it as part of their calling to reform the Anglican Church despite their strong theological differences with that church. Hence, for all practical purposes, they were a distinct movement from the broader Anglican body, despite technically being a part of that body on paper. The Pietist movement in the Lutheran Church was another example of this. And the

Methodists in the Anglican Church were another later example of this as well. Usually over time, these movements separate from the larger denomination and become a new denomination. The Confessional Independent Bible Churches branch is made up of both movements as well as individual churches that are not part of any specific broader movement.

Like denominations, movements also allow a lot of freedom for individual churches over certain matters. The difference from a denomination is that these movements can't really kick anyone out of the movement because there exists no formal organizational structure. However, movements often have ways of saying that this or that church is not truly a part of their movement. One example is that movements often hold conferences for their movement to discuss and strategize about things that pertain to their movement. And they can refuse to invite churches that are not teaching the same beliefs and practices of the movement overall. If the churches they seek to exclude are truly Christian, this should be done in the most gentle manner possible. The conference should make it clear that they are not condemning the excluded church or churches as false teachers. They need to make it clear that they still accept these churches as brothers and sisters in Christ, and are very willing to work with them on many other issues. But, they can gently say that they do believe the distinctives of their movement are important and so they wish that these other churches would start their own movement because these churches do not believe the distinctives of the movement that is putting on the conference.

Before moving forward into our discussion on schools of thought, I want to touch on two tricky items. The first is that it must be said that the term *movement* is often used very broadly. One can talk about the rock and roll movement in the 1900's for example. And the term is often used broadly in discussions on the church as well. So, for example, one could talk about the Baptist movement. And by this one would simply be referring to the history and development of the Baptist branch. In the discussion above, I was using the term in a more technical sense. You should be aware of the fact that often in my works I also use it in the more broad sense. I apologize for this ambiguity, but it is somewhat impossible to avoid because this is how the term is so often used in our culture. Usually you will be able to tell from the context if I am using the term in the more

broad sense or in the more technical sense. Further, whether I capitalize the term or not throughout my works may also be confusing. When I capitalize the term it is generally because the term is actually part of the title of a specific group. When I do not capitalize it, it is generally because the term is not part of the official title of a group and I am just making it clear that it is a movement, either in the broad sense or in the more technical sense.

The second tricky item is the fact that many true Bible-believing churches stay in apostate denominations because they believe that it is their duty to try to reform these denominations. Such churches are very difficult to classify. This is because they do not neatly fit into any of the three main categories I laid out, namely denominations, movements, and schools of thought. They are not technically denominations even when all of these true churches in a particular apostate denomination are looked at collectively. This is because they are all simply part of a broader denomination. But, they are also not really movements. Movements generally depart from the original denomination on some key points. However, these churches are actually in line with the original denomination, while it is the actual present denomination that has radically departed from the beliefs and practices of the original denomination. And they are not schools of thought either as they specifically believe in the core distinctives of the original denomination.

While my classification solution is far from perfect and you should be aware of this, I believe that these churches should collectively be seen as a denomination within an apostate denomination. I think this is especially the case because they often band together in official ways. For instance, I was part of a Confessional Presbyterian church when I first became Confessional Presbyterian that was part of an apostate denomination (the PCUSA). I was not happy to be part of an apostate denomination at all, but there were no other Confessional Presbyterian churches in my entire county and this was an amazing church. And what eased my conscience a great deal was the fact that my church was part of what was known as “The Confessing Church.” This was a band of PCUSA churches that believed in the historic confessions of Confessional Presbyterianism and were committed to trying to reform the denomination. You may say, “Ok, that sort of just sounds like your definition of a movement above.” I agree, but the

key difference is that a movement is trying to move a denomination away (not in a heretical sense) from its original positions, while a denomination within an apostate denomination is trying to move a denomination back to its original positions for the most part.

Before plowing forward, I am of the strong opinion that movements (whether in an orthodox or apostate denomination) and denominations within an apostate denomination should just leave their denomination. I believe that the failure to do this only creates a lot of confusion. I understand that it is often a very difficult thing to leave a beloved denomination, but again, I believe it is the biblical thing to do. With that said, because so many wonderful true Christians do not agree with me on this point, you should be aware of some of these nuances.

A school of thought refers to a doctrine or set of doctrines that crosses over multiple branches of the Christian tree. Ultimately, each branch is made up of churches that hold to a certain combination of schools of thought. And each denomination within the branches holds to a certain combination of schools of thought, with each individual church holding to a certain combination of schools of thought. The same is true with movements. And within each school of thought, there are sub-schools of thought. Allow me to break things down a bit to try to better explain all of this.

There are two basic overarching schools of thought when it comes to baptizing infants. There are those that believe we should baptize infants, and those that believe we should not. There are two overarching schools of thought when it comes to the belief that Jesus' literal body and blood is in the Lord's Supper. There are those that believe that Jesus is in some sense literally present in the Lord's Supper in His human nature, and those that believe the bread and wine/grape juice only symbolize His body and blood. But there are key sub-schools of thought within these overarching schools of thought as well. For instance, there are those that believe that an infant should be baptized as soon as possible. But, there are those that believe the infant should be baptized when the mother is ready. Concerning those who take a more figurative view of the Lord's Supper, there are those who believe that the bread and wine/grape juice are only symbols and we should leave it at that. But, there are those who believe that

Jesus is present in a more powerful manner through the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper, just not physically present.

With these examples laid out, let's look at how they play out in the actual branches. The Confessional Lutherans; the Confessional Continental Reformed Churches; the Confessional Anglicans; the Confessional Presbyterians; the Confessional Congregationalists; and the Confessional Methodists; all hold to the school of thought that says infants should be baptized. And many individual churches and true Christians within the above branches also hold to the sub-school of thought that infants should be baptized as soon as possible. Most of the other churches in the above branches allow for freedom concerning this sub-school of thought, but most of them tend to lean towards the sub-school of thought that says the infant should be baptized when the mother is ready. The Confessional Baptists firmly hold to the school of thought that infants should not be baptized. The Confessional Pentecostals, the Confessional Independent Bible Churches, and the Confessional Charismatic Churches all allow for freedom on this question, but most of the denominations, movements, and churches within these branches hold to the position that infants should not be baptized.

The Confessional Lutherans hold to the position that Jesus is literally present in the Lord's Supper. The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom on this point. All of the other branches hold to the school of thought that says that Jesus is not literally present in the Lord's Supper as far as His human nature is concerned. But, the Confessional Continental Reformed, the Confessional Presbyterians, and the Confessional Congregationalists all firmly hold to the sub-school of thought that says that Jesus is present in a unique way through the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper. The Confessional Baptists; the Confessional Methodists; the Confessional Pentecostals; the Confessional Independent Bible Churches; and the Confessional Charismatic Churches; all allow for freedom on this point, but most of the denominations, movements, and churches within these branches either hold to or lean in the direction of saying that the bread and wine/grape juice are symbols and we should leave it at that.

In the final two chapters, we will briefly look at the very basic history of each branch, as well as the basic combination of schools of thought that each embraces. What we will do in the next chapter is look at the major schools of thought within the

church today. Now it needs to be said that there are lots and lots of schools of thought within the church. And each of these schools of thought has subcategories, and even many of these have further subcategories. Don't let that be discouraging to you. Life can be terribly complicated and so theologians are simply trying their best to help the church apply Scripture to any and all issues and questions. You do not need to know about all of these schools of thought and the subcategories within them, I cannot emphasize that enough. They exist so that pastors can look them up as necessary in order to help their members. When confronted with a very difficult and complicated scenario or question where you do not know what the Bible has to say on it, pray about it first, then go see your pastor and he should be able to help you as best as he can from what theologians have said about the topic. Having said all of that, it is good and helpful to have a very basic understanding of the 10 overarching branches of the Christian tree.

Before we dive into the next chapter, I do want to say that there are denominations, movements, churches, and Christians that do not neatly fit into any of the 10 overarching branches and that is ok. As long as a person loves Jesus above all else and shows this love by believing all that the Bible teaches with complete clarity, he or she is a true Christian and must be accepted as such. With that said, most Christians and churches worldwide do fall into one of the 10 main branches.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Schools of Thought

The Schools of Thought

(1) Predestination

There are two primary schools of thought within the church regarding predestination. The first is that God has in some sense predestined all things and that He has done so in such a way that He ordained the doctrines of grace. Those who hold to this position are known as *Calvinists* or *Reformed*. For background on these

doctrines, see the second book of my “basics” series, where I go over them. For more background on the titles *Calvinist* and *Reformed*, see my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. The second school of thought here says that while God has predestined many things and knows all things and is in control of all things to some extent, it is not right to say that He actually predestines all things. Further, this second position would not hold to all of the doctrines of grace. Now some in this position hold to some of the doctrines of grace, while others reject all of them. And some in this position would agree that God has predestined all things, but would say that we can only say this with the utmost caution and would also not hold to all of the doctrines of grace. This second view is often known as *Arminianism*, but many who adopt this school of thought do not like this term and can be better called *non-Reformed*.

(2) Evolution and the Age of the Universe

There are three basic schools of thought over this question. The first is known as *theistic evolution*. Many non-Christians also use this term, but here I am only talking about the position as it is used in the true church. The second school of thought is known as *progressive creationism* (not to be confused with Progressive Christianity). Sometimes it is called the *old-universe* or *old-earth* view. The third school of thought is known as *young-earth creationism*. I cover these differences in the second book of my “basics” series as well (chapter 1).

(3) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

There are three primary schools of thought when it comes to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. All true Christians believe that all genuine Christians have been born again by the Spirit. We all agree that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us throughout our Christian lives. None of those doctrines are at issue here. The traditional position has always been that all Christians receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit when they are first saved. They say that this is an influx of the power of the Spirit beyond what was given to the

people of God before Pentecost. They also say that this is when Christians are given their spiritual gifts.

The Pentecostal school of thought says that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is something that takes place after we come to Jesus. They also say that it is something we must seek out as Christians. They say that it gives us an influx of power from the Spirit, it equips us for ministry, it provides us with most of our spiritual gifts (they recognize that other Christians do have some spiritual gifts), and it gives us boldness to preach the gospel. Further, they say that everyone who receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit also speaks in tongues. Speaking in tongues refers to receiving the ability to speak in a foreign language that one does not know how to speak. Those who take the Pentecostal position are aware of the fact that many of them who claim to speak in another language are not actually speaking in any known foreign language. They claim that when this takes place, they are speaking in an angelic language.

The Pentecostal position also heavily emphasizes their belief that some of the spiritual gifts are miraculous gifts, and they believe that almost all of these gifts are still in operation today. The first school of thought has for the most part (there has been exceptions here) believed that the miraculous gifts ceased with the completion of the Bible. That doesn't mean that they believe God no longer does any miracles. They only believe that there are no individual Christians with any gift whereby he or she can regularly perform miracles. It should also be said that while the Pentecostal position is most associated with the Confessional Pentecostals, there are many within the Confessional Independent Bible Churches branch that also hold to the Pentecostal position. They are not part of an official Pentecostal denomination, so I would say that they are Confessional Independent Bible with Pentecostal theology. Some would just call them Pentecostal, but I do think it is helpful to make proper distinctions.

The third school of thought here is the Charismatic position. It agrees with the Pentecostal position on a number of key points. This is why people often blend Pentecostals and Charismatics together, but I do not think that is fully accurate from a historical perspective. Both positions agree that the baptism of the Spirit is a post-conversion experience that must be sought out by the true Christian. Both positions agree that the baptism of the Holy Spirit provides the Christian with an influx of

power, most of his or her spiritual gifts, equips him or her for ministry, and grants him or her boldness to preach the gospel. Both sides agree that most of the miraculous gifts are in operation today. Both sides agree that speaking in tongues is one of those miraculous gifts that are in operation today, and that often Christians with this gift speak in an angelic language. Where the two sides disagree is over the fact that the Pentecostal position firmly states that the baptism of the Spirit will always be accompanied by speaking in tongues, whereas the Charismatic position states that only sometimes is it accompanied by this gift.

(4) Infant Baptism

As discussed above, the two overarching schools of thought on this doctrine are over the question of whether or not infants should be baptized.

(5) The Lord's Supper

As discussed above, there are two overarching schools of thought on this doctrine. The one believes that Jesus is literally present in some sense in His human nature. The other does not. Within the first school of thought, there are a number of subcategories and we will not cover all of them here. What we will cover are two basic sub-schools of thought within the first school, and two within the second. As far as the first school goes, the Confessional Lutherans hold that Jesus' body and blood are added to the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. So they believe that both bread and Jesus' body are present; and they believe that both wine and Jesus' blood are present. They call this position *consubstantiation* (this doctrine goes back to Luther himself). Some Confessional Anglicans hold that the bread and wine are actually turned into the body and blood of Jesus. As far as the second school goes, as we discussed above, some believe that the bread and wine/grape juice are symbols only, while a second sub-school of thought believes that Jesus is present in a more pronounced way through the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper.

(6) Symbols and Art in Church Services

There are two basic overarching schools of thought regarding this question. There are those that believe that a great deal of symbols and art should be used in church services as aids to the worship of God. Others believe that only mild amounts of symbols and art should be used. All Christians agree that art is a godly thing. That is not what is at debate here. The debate is over the place of symbols and art in actual church services. Some in the second position go so far as to say that no symbols or art should be used other than the sacraments or ordinances. Some in the second position also go so far as to say that no symbols of God, any of the persons of the Trinity, should be used at all, not just in church services, other than the Lord's Supper.

(7) Church Government

There are three primary schools of thought regarding the proper form of church government. All true Christians, based on Scripture, believe that at the very least a local church must have pastors and deacons or be working towards that. However, the first school of thought believes that above pastors (sometimes pastors are called elders or priests or ministers), there are to be bishops. A bishop governs a number of churches, usually over a geographical area, with each church having pastors reporting to him or her. Usually in this system, the bishops come together to make decisions for the denomination as a whole. This is known as the *episcopal* type of church government.

The second major school of thought is known as the *presbyterian* system of church government. This system does not believe in bishops, but it does believe that denominations should have a system in place beyond the local church. This type says that the pastors of the churches should get together to make decisions pertaining to the denomination as a whole. The third school of thought is known as the *congregational* system or type of church government. This system believes in pastors and deacons, but it says that they are under the authority of the members of the church. The members of the church actually do the governing, while the pastors primarily preach and teach, and the deacons have other duties. Sometimes individual churches hold to the

congregational model, and are not formally connected to any other churches. However, there are denominations that hold to the congregational model, and when this is the case, usually representatives from each church in the denomination are selected to come together to discuss and vote on matters that pertain to the denomination as a whole.

There are other forms of church government in the true church today. The Calvary Chapel movement, for example, has a very unique form of church government. Many Reformed Baptists (as the name indicates, these are Baptists who are also Calvinists), hold to a view that is similar to the presbyterian view, but is not identical with it. Many people assume that only Presbyterians hold to the presbyterian type, but that actually isn't the case. Hence, when you see *presbyterian*, it refers to the type of church government, and when you see *Presbyterian*, it refers to a person or church who goes by that official title. Unfortunately, as was made clear in the first book of my "basics" series (final chapter), because there are so many Liberal Protestant "Presbyterians," it is necessary to call Bible-believing ones like myself *Confessional Presbyterians*. With all that said, the three basic types discussed above are the main views that are held by the vast majority of true Christians worldwide.

Before moving forward, it should be said that another major debated point regarding church government is the place of women as deacons, pastors, and/or bishops. Many in the church believe that women should not take any of these positions. Others believe that women should be allowed to take any of them. And some believe that women can be deacons, but should not be pastors or bishops. All Christians agree that women should be integrally involved in the church though. They can be part of all sorts of ministries in the church, and they can and should be leaders in many of these ministries (this position is taken even by those who believe that women should not be deacons, pastors, or bishops). And all true Christians agree that women are completely equal to men. Those, like myself, who believe that women should not be deacons or pastors (I don't believe in the position of bishop), believe that this is only the case because God has given them different roles or because it is part of their punishment from the fall. I take the latter position. But, all those like myself who take that position are quick to point out that men were punished at the fall as well. In fact, as I make clear

in the third book to my “basics” series (chapter 4), men were punished more and will be judged more strictly at the final judgment.

(8) The Sabbath

There are two primary schools of thought regarding the place of the Sabbath after Pentecost. The first says that the Sabbath has been done away with by God. This school says that they still believe in the spirit of the 4th Commandment by worshiping God on Sunday, and by making sure to get enough rest and time with God throughout the week. The second school says that God transferred the Sabbath from the last day of the week before Pentecost, to the first day of the week (Sunday) after Pentecost. This school says that it is not enough to merely have a worship service on Sundays. They say that the entire day of Sunday should be one of rest and worship.

(9) Missions

There are two basic schools of thought regarding missionary work. All true Christians believe in and support missionary work. But there is a disagreement over emphasis. Most Christians believe that the church should make missions a top priority. They are not seeking to downplay the very important role that Christian families play in expanding God’s church. They understand that most people are saved by being raised in Christian homes. That has always been God’s primary way of doing things on that front. However, they still think that a huge emphasis should be placed on foreign missionary work. The second school of thought believes that the far greater emphasis should be placed upon fostering Christian homes and Christian culture. This position says that when a culture is strongly Christian, it can be far more effective at influencing the world and making missions work easier and more natural.

(10) End Times

There are three overarching schools of thought when it comes to the end times. The first is known as *premillennialism*. It states that when Jesus returns, He will set up a literal thousand year kingdom on earth. During this time, Satan will be bound and there will be a time of tremendous peace on the earth. After this time though, Satan will be released and there will be a short rebellion. After Jesus squashes this rebellion, He will inaugurate the eternal state. The second is known as *amillennialism*. It states that God will continue to expand His people, but they will always be a remnant on the earth until Jesus returns. When Jesus returns, He will set up the eternal state. The third is known as *postmillennialism*. This view states that the church will grow and grow until it becomes dominant on the earth. After that time, Jesus will return and set up the eternal state. There are a number of key subcategories under the first school. I cover them and all of these schools in more detail in the second book of my “basics” series (final chapter).

It should also be noted that most of those that hold to one of the sub-schools within the first school also hold to what is known as *dispensationalism*. I am using the term here only to describe a school of thought. Originally, there was a heretical movement that went by the same label. Later, good Christians got rid of the heretical elements and believed that on certain points the movement was making good points. Hence, there are what I would call *Semi-Dispensationalists* today. They are Bible-believing Christians who hold to the dispensational school of thought, but who reject the heresies of the original movement. They disagree with what is known as *covenant theology*. Covenant theology is what I defended in book two of my “basics” series (chapter 4). Semi-Dispensationalists say that there are not only two overarching covenants (the covenant of works and the covenant of grace according to covenant theologians like myself), but that there are a number of testing periods from God that they call *dispensations*. Usually they say there are 7 of these dispensations, but some advocate for a different number. They also make a very sharp separation between Israel and the church. Covenant theologians distinguish between Israel and the church, but disagree with the striking line Semi-Dispensationalists try to put between Israel and the church.

Final Remarks

I understand that these differences can be discouraging. And it is even more unfortunate when Christians become too heated over them. When certain people seek to divide over them, they are not true Christians as we are to fully embrace all of our true brothers and sisters in Christ. With all that said, don't ever forget that as true Christians we agree on like 95% of doctrine. That is a lot of agreement!

We all agree that the Bible is God's word. We all agree that it is infallible and inerrant. We all agree on God's basic attributes. We all agree that God created everything from nothing. We all agree that God has predestined at least some core things. We all agree that God providentially brings forth His plan and purpose. We all agree on the Trinity. We all agree on the existence of angels, including the fallen ones. We all agree that our chief enemy is Satan, and that he is a very real being. We all agree that all humans can be saved. We all agree that God created humans as male and female, in His image. We all agree that Jesus is one person with two natures (His divine nature and His human nature). We all agree on the basic elements of the life and work of Jesus, especially His crucifixion; resurrection; ascension; intercession; and bodily return. We all agree that God saves us from His wrath through the cross. We all agree that we are saved from the penalty and the power of sin. We all agree that we receive salvation by faith alone. We all agree on the existence of both heaven and hell. We all agree that all unbelievers will spend eternity in hell. We all agree that we will spend eternity with God on the new earth. We all agree on the basics of the Christian life, especially the importance of Bible reading and prayer. I could give many, many more examples and I could elaborate on each of these points as well. For two thousand years, all true Christians have been united on these things because we all worship the same God; the one and only true Triune God of all things!

Chapter 3: Overview of the Branches Part 1

The Branches

The Confessional Lutherans

The way we will approach things in these final two chapters is at the beginning of each section I will give a very, very brief historical introduction to each of the branches. Then I will provide a list corresponding to the numbers that were given in the previous chapter on the schools of thought. I will explain in each number what each branch holds concerning that school of thought. Thus, by the end of the list you will know what combination each branch holds concerning the major differing schools of thought within the true church today. For more information on each of the branches from a historical perspective, see my book on church history. For more information specifically on Confessional Presbyterianism from a historical perspective, see my *A Brief History of Confessional Presbyterianism*. It will be up on my website in the next year. If you really want to dig in deeper from a historical perspective, I recommend the bibliography at the end of my book *A False Kind of Christianity*, especially the section on church history specifically.

The Confessional Lutheran branch of the Christian tree goes back to Martin Luther in the 1500's in Germany. Martin Luther was the first of the great Reformers during the Protestant Reformation. He and the Protestant movement were preceded by many great teachers and movements in the centuries before the 1500's. Three of the most notable were the Waldensians, the Lollards, and the Hussites. But none of these movements were ever as clear or went as far as the early Protestants did in correcting the true church from all of the errors that had developed from the Catholic and Byzantine wings of the church during the Middle Ages. And Martin Luther was the first of these great leaders in the 1500's. As other branches of the tree began to develop within Protestantism, those that were most loyal to Luther's specific theological distinctives became known as *the Lutherans*. Over time, many Lutheran denominations have sprouted up, and these true denominations have had to fight to distinguish themselves from the false Liberal Protestant "Lutheran" denominations that have developed.

- 1.) The Confessional Lutherans reject the Reformed view of predestination.
- 2.) The Confessional Lutherans allow for freedom concerning the question of evolution and the age of the earth. But, most reject theistic evolution.
- 3.) The Confessional Lutherans hold to the traditional view concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- 4.) The Confessional Lutherans hold to the doctrine of infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Lutherans hold to the view known as *consubstantiation* concerning the Lord's Supper.
- 6.) The Confessional Lutherans allow for freedom concerning art and symbols in church services, but most lean towards a lot of art and symbols.
- 7.) The Confessional Lutherans allow for freedom on church government, but most either adopt or lean towards the episcopal type.
- 8.) The Confessional Lutherans do not hold that the Sabbath is binding after Pentecost.
- 9.) The Confessional Lutherans believe that a high emphasis should be placed on foreign missions.
- 10.) The Confessional Lutherans allow for freedom on the question of the end times, but most lean in the direction of amillennialism.

The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches

The first group to split off from the Lutherans was known as *the Reformed*. Their first great leader in the 1500's was Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland. However, the movement spread to France and England through the influence of two other great leaders of the early Protestant movement. These were John Calvin and William Tyndale. John Calvin did most of his work in Geneva, which was part of Switzerland. But, he himself was French and Geneva was right on the border of France (it still is). Therefore, many disciples of Calvin took the gospel into France. Tyndale spread the Reformed movement in England. Later, the Reformed movement gained a huge foothold in the Netherlands as well. Over time, the Reformed in Great Britain began to

have differing views on certain things and most joined the later Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, or the Puritans. Hence, the Reformed that were on the main continent of Europe became known as the Continental Reformed. Like the Confessional Lutherans, the Confessional Continental Reformed Churches have had many denominations spring up and have also had to fight to distinguish themselves from false Liberal Protestant “Reformed” denominations.

- 1.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches hold to the Reformed doctrine of predestination.
- 2.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches allow for freedom on evolution and the age of the earth, but most reject theistic evolution.
- 3.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches hold to the traditional view of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- 4.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches hold to the doctrine of infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches reject any notion that Jesus is literally present in His human nature in the Lord’s Supper, but do hold to the sub-position that Jesus is present in a heightened sense through the Holy Spirit.
- 6.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches allow for freedom regarding art and symbols in church services, but most lean towards having little art and symbols.
- 7.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches hold to the presbyterian type of church government.
- 8.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches believe that the Sabbath is binding after Pentecost.
- 9.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches believe that more emphasis should be placed on developing Christian homes and Christian cultures than on foreign missions.
- 10.) The Confessional Continental Reformed Churches allow for freedom on the end times, but most lean in the direction of amillennialism.

The Confessional Anglicans

The Confessional Anglicans go back to England during the time of the Reformation. King Henry VIII, who was a very immoral man, outwardly became a Protestant because he was having major conflict with the Catholic Church. However, he felt that if he tried to change too much too fast, the people would not go along with his changes. Therefore, he kept the church looking very “Catholic” and even retained a number of Catholic teachings and practices. But on the core items of Protestantism, the country of England became part of the Anglican Church (the Church of England), which was the new Protestant wing of the Reformation started by Henry. Later, when his son Edward became king (who was a very godly young man), the Anglican Church moved in a more fully Protestant direction. There had already been a number of people in England that were very Protestant due to the influence of Tyndale though. Unfortunately, Edward died shortly after taking the throne and his sister Mary took over the country. She was a devout Catholic and began to mercilessly persecute God’s true people in England. Her reign did not last long and she was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth. Elizabeth sought to bring the Anglican Church back closer to where it was under her father Henry. But, by this time there were already a lot of people in the country that did not want to go backwards. These folks became known as *the Puritans* and we will discuss them more soon.

During the Revolutionary War in what would become the United States, Anglicans broke off from the Anglican Church while still retaining the basic theology of Anglicanism. Hence, they were and still are considered part of the Anglican branch of the tree. But they called themselves *Episcopalians* in order to distinguish themselves from the Anglican Church. Many other denominations arose over the centuries that held to Anglican theology and most of them today are part of the Anglican Communion. This is an organization of Anglican denominations in union with the Church of England. Other than the Church of England itself, these denominations are not part of the Church of England and do not have to submit to the English government. They are simply in communion with the Church of England. Unfortunately, many of these denominations and many of the churches in these denominations, especially the Church of England

itself and the Episcopal Church based in the United States, are very Liberal Protestant. Therefore, the true churches in the Anglican Communion should leave this organization in my opinion, but most feel called to stay in the hopes of reforming the organization. I disagree strongly with that position, but we must still accept these true churches as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

To clarify, many of the denominations within the Anglican Communion are true denominations. I simply feel that they should leave the Anglican Communion because that organization allows for so many Liberal Protestant denominations. Many other denominations within the Communion are Liberal Protestant, but do have many churches within them that would be part of what I called earlier denominations within an apostate denomination. I believe that such churches should leave both their denomination and the Anglican Communion. In our nation today, there are very few true churches that are Anglican in their theology, although there are some. But, in Africa, there exists a thriving community of Bible-believing Anglicans.

- 1.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom on the question of predestination, but most lean towards the non-Reformed position.
- 2.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe.
- 3.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom on the question of Spirit baptism, but most adopt the traditional position. With that said, there are a lot who adopt the Charismatic position.
- 4.) The Confessional Anglicans adopt the doctrine and practice of infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom on the question of the Lord's Supper. They are the only branch that has a number of adherents who hold to the position that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus.
- 6.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom concerning art and symbols in church services, but most adopt or lean towards the position of having a lot of them.
- 7.) The Confessional Anglicans adopt the episcopal form of church government.

- 8.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom concerning the question of the Sabbath.
- 9.) The Confessional Anglicans adopt the position that missions should be highly emphasized in the church.
- 10.) The Confessional Anglicans allow for freedom on the question of the end times, but most adopt amillennialism.

The Confessional Presbyterians

The Confessional Presbyterians trace their spiritual lineage back to John Knox in Scotland. John Knox was a disciple of John Calvin. Hence, the Confessional Presbyterians are highly influenced by Calvin, very similar to the Confessional Continental Reformed Churches. In fact, these two branches are almost identical in all respects and many classify them together. But, I think it is more historically accurate to distinguish between them as they have had very differing approaches to missions, and I think that difference is important. Confessional Presbyterianism spread to the American Colonies where it had a massive impact on the early United States. From Scotland and the U.S., it has spread all over the world, especially to South Korea and Africa. With that said, Liberal Protestantism has done horrible damage to this branch of the Christian tree. There are very few true Confessional Presbyterian churches left in Scotland or the United States today. However, because of the influence of the great RC Sproul, it is starting to slowly make a comeback in our nation, and it continues to thrive in other parts of the world.

- 1.) The Confessional Presbyterians hold to the Reformed doctrine of predestination.
- 2.) The Confessional Presbyterians allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe. Few hold to theistic evolution and most hold to the young earth view, but many do hold to progressive creationism.
- 3.) The Confessional Presbyterians hold to the traditional view of Spirit baptism.
- 4.) The Confessional Presbyterians hold to infant baptism.

- 5.) The Confessional Presbyterians adopt the view of the Lord's Supper that Jesus' human nature is not literally present, but that Jesus in His person is present in a more profound way than normal in the Supper through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 6.) The Confessional Presbyterians allow for freedom concerning art and symbols in church services, but most either adopt or strongly lean towards the position of having as few as possible. Many Confessional Presbyterians are very conservative on this question, and believe in having no art or symbols in church services.
- 7.) The Confessional Presbyterians adopt the presbyterian form of church government.
- 8.) The Confessional Presbyterians believe that the Sabbath is still in force after Pentecost.
- 9.) The Confessional Presbyterians believe that the church should highly emphasize foreign missions.
- 10.) The Confessional Presbyterians allow for freedom on the end times, but most are amillennial. With that said, there are a lot of postmillennialists and their number is growing.

The Confessional Congregationalists

The Confessional Congregationalists trace their spiritual lineage back to the Puritans. The Puritans were originally a movement within the Anglican Church at the end of the 1500's and the beginning of the 1600's. They were not Anglican in their theology. They were very close in theology to the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. However, they believed they were called by God to reform the church and nation of England. Even though they were largely unsuccessful in their efforts to make the Anglican Church more Protestant, they were some of the most godly and devout true Christians ever to walk the face of the earth. Eventually the movement did sprout off from the Anglican Church in the Colonies, and it officially embraced the congregational type of church government. This made the movement unique from the Reformed and

Presbyterian churches despite how many commonalities the movement had with these wings of the church at the time. Today, this branch of the church is relatively small compared to the other branches. And in our country, almost all that call themselves “Congregationalist,” are thoroughly Liberal Protestant. This is so sad because the Puritans laid the foundation for our country. Today, most Confessional Congregationalists are in Africa. However, the Confessional Presbyterians still look to the Puritans for inspiration.

- 1.) The Confessional Congregationalists hold to the Reformed doctrine of predestination.
- 2.) The Confessional Congregationalists allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe.
- 3.) The Confessional Congregationalists hold to the traditional view of Spirit baptism.
- 4.) The Confessional Congregationalists hold to infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Congregationalists hold to the view of the Lord’s Supper that Jesus is not literally present in the Supper in a physical manner, but is present in a stronger fashion through the Spirit.
- 6.) The Confessional Congregationalists hold to the position that art and symbols should be minimal in church services.
- 7.) The Confessional Congregationalists hold to the congregational model of church government.
- 8.) The Confessional Congregationalists believe that the Sabbath is in force after Pentecost.
- 9.) The Confessional Congregationalists believe in foreign missions, but say that we should place most of the emphasis on Christian families and Christian culture.
- 10.) The Confessional Congregationalists allow for freedom on the question of the end times, but most are amillennial.

Chapter 4: Overview of the Branches Part 2 and Conclusion

The Branches Continued

The Confessional Baptists

The Confessional Baptists go back to John Smythe in the 1600's. Many people mistakenly believe that the Baptists go back to the Anabaptists, but this is not the case. The Anabaptists were heretics, but the original Baptists were true Christians. The Baptists spread slowly throughout England and eventually made their way over to the Colonies, where they were also a small group until the Great Awakening. The Great Awakening was the greatest revival in all of church history. It took place in England and the Colonies in the mid-1700's. It was led by the powerful preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John Wesley. Through them millions of people gave their lives to Jesus. The two groups that grew exponentially during this time were the Baptists and the Methodists, especially in the Southern Colonies. This is why to this day, the two largest branches of the Christian tree in the Old South are the Confessional Baptists and the Confessional Methodists. The Baptists have always had a strong presence throughout our nation, and there are many of them in Africa as well. Also, there are a number in Myanmar because of the missionary work of the Judsons. The Baptists have also had to fend off Liberal Protestants as well. There are also a number of Liberal Protestant "Baptist" denominations in our country that must be carefully distinguished from our Confessional Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ.

Before wrapping up this section on the Confessional Baptists, I think it is important to briefly discuss the independent or Fundamentalist Baptist churches. These are churches that are Baptist in their theology, but are not part of any denomination. Some of these are heretical and are part of what I would consider the current Fundamentalist Movement, that I believe is very out of bounds. I discuss this movement more in my book on church history. However, most of these churches are godly churches. They tend to be extremely conservative in their theology though, and some get far too close to being fully Fundamentalist in the current sense of that term. With all that said, I would classify these true churches as being part of the Independent Bible

Churches branch even though most of these churches would not appreciate this classification. I in no way mean to offend, but I just think that is more accurate.

- 1.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of predestination, but most either adopt or lean in the non-Reformed direction. Having said that, there is a sizable and vocal minority that holds to the Calvinist position. They are known as *Reformed Baptists*.
- 2.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the earth, but most hold to the young universe view.
- 3.) The Confessional Baptists for the most part hold to the traditional view on Spirit baptism.
- 4.) The Confessional Baptists reject infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of the Lord's Supper, but most hold to the view that the bread and wine/grape juice are only symbols. However, most Reformed Baptists hold to the view that Jesus is present in a more powerful way than normal through the Spirit.
- 6.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of art and symbols in church services, but most hold to the view that they should be minimal.
- 7.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of church government, but most hold to the congregational view.
- 8.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of the Sabbath, but most hold that it is no longer binding after Pentecost. Most Reformed Baptists though, do hold to the view that the Sabbath is still in force today.
- 9.) The Confessional Baptists believe that foreign missions should be highly emphasized in the church.
- 10.) The Confessional Baptists allow for freedom on the question of the end times, but most hold to the premillennial view. And most hold to Semi-Dispensationalism and the view that the rapture will take place separately from the full second coming, just before the beginning of the tribulation. However, most Reformed Baptists hold to amillennialism or postmillennialism.

The Confessional Methodists

The Confessional Methodists go back to John Wesley, mentioned earlier. He was an Anglican and felt that the Anglican Church had become too stale and culturally bound to England. He felt that this led to far too many “Christians” going through the motions and he was largely correct, although there were still a lot of faithful Anglicans at that time. He strongly emphasized certain methods of discipleship, such as prayer; Bible reading; Bible studies; small group gatherings; and evangelistic preaching outside of the churches. Wesley also held to a very controversial doctrine, known as *perfectionism*. Full-blown perfectionism is heresy as it states that a Christian can get to a point where he or she can live a sinless life. Wesley was not going that far, but said that true Christians could get to a point where they were largely free of conscious, overt, willful sin. I vehemently disagree with this doctrine, as do most true Christians, but it is not completely heretical as he was clear that true Christians will always sin on some level.

Eventually, Wesley and his followers were too out of step with the Anglicans and so their movement broke off and formed the Methodist denomination. Eventually, many other Methodist denominations sprouted up all over the world, and unfortunately, many Liberal Protestant Methodists came on the scene as well. The United Methodist Church is the largest Methodist denomination, and it is a Liberal Protestant denomination. However, many true Christians and churches are still within this denomination in the hopes of reforming it. I wish they would leave the denomination, but we must still accept them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. With that said, there are many excellent Confessional Methodist denominations around the world, especially in Africa. And the African Methodist Episcopal Church is the primary African American Confessional Methodist denomination in our country. It has had a huge impact on our country and the church throughout its history. Anyone can of course join the denomination, but historically it has mostly ministered to African Americans.

1.) The Confessional Methodists reject the Reformed doctrine of predestination.

Early Methodists actually allowed for freedom on this question, and there were a lot of Calvinist Methodists, especially in Wales. But, because of the influence of

Wesley, who was very opposed to the Reformed view, Methodism eventually rejected the Reformed view across the board.

- 2.) The Confessional Methodists allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe.
- 3.) The Confessional Methodists hold to the traditional view of Spirit baptism for the most part. However, it must be said that many Methodists hold that one can seek what they call “a second work of grace,” that takes place after conversion. They say that this can lead to the perfectionism Wesley taught. Because it is a post-conversion experience, it sounds very similar to the Pentecostal and Charismatic doctrines, but the difference is that this experience is not always equated with Spirit baptism, although sometimes it is.
- 4.) The Confessional Methodists hold to infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Methodists allow for freedom on the question of the Lord’s Supper.
- 6.) The Confessional Methodists allow for freedom on the question of art and symbols in church services, but most lean towards the view that there should be a lot.
- 7.) The Confessional Methodists hold to the episcopal form of church government.
- 8.) The Confessional Methodists allow for freedom on the question of the Sabbath.
- 9.) The Confessional Methodists hold to the view that foreign missions should be highly emphasized in the church.
- 10.) The Confessional Methodists allow for freedom on the question of the end times.

The Confessional Pentecostals

The Confessional Pentecostals trace their spiritual lineage back to the early 1900’s and a man named William Seymour. Many try to say that Charles Parham was the true founder of this movement, but he held to heretical views, and it was Seymour who was a true Christian and really took the movement forward with the Azusa Street Revival in Southern California. This movement from its inception struggled to keep away

radicals and heretics. Eventually, the Assemblies of God denomination was formed to take a stand for orthodox, Bible-believing Pentecostalism. This denomination spread rapidly throughout the world, and has a large presence in South America, Africa, and Asia today. There are other Confessional Pentecostal denominations in the world today, but to this day the most sound is the Assemblies of God. Today, this is the largest branch on the Christian tree.

- 1.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of predestination, but most reject the Reformed view.
- 2.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe, but most hold to young-earth creationism.
- 3.) The Confessional Pentecostals hold to the Pentecostal view of Spirit baptism.
- 4.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of infant baptism, but the overwhelming vast majority reject the doctrine.
- 5.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of the Lord's Supper, but most hold to the view that the bread and wine/grape juice are merely symbols.
- 6.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of art and symbols in church services, but most hold to the view that they should be minimal.
- 7.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of church government, but the Assemblies of God denomination has a form of church government that is very similar to the presbyterian model.
- 8.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the question of the Sabbath, but most hold to the view that it is no longer binding after Pentecost.
- 9.) The Confessional Pentecostals hold to the view that foreign missions should be highly emphasized in the church.
- 10.) The Confessional Pentecostals allow for freedom on the end times, but most hold to premillennialism. And most hold to Semi-Dispensationalism as well. Further, most hold to the view that the rapture will take place just before the tribulation, separately from the full second coming.

The Confessional Independent Bible Churches

This branch of the church began at the end of the 1800's and into the early 1900's. It came out of the Semi-Dispensationalists bringing necessary corrections to Dispensational theology. And many of them were very opposed to denominations because of how many of them had given in to the Liberal Protestants. Liberal Protestants and true Christians entered into a period of intense battle within many denominations in the early 1900's in our country. So it was no surprise that many true Christians had had it with denominations, and it is hard to blame them. Over time, many in this branch did not embrace any form of Dispensationalism, but most still do hold to Semi-Dispensationalism. Because this branch did not really get fully cooking until the conflict mentioned above, I place them historically after the rise of Pentecostalism, even though you could make a case for placing them before. Many people give different names to these independent churches. Some call them *non-denominational churches*; some call them *Bible churches*; some call them *Fundamentalist churches* (this is not an ideal designation though for reasons I more fully explain in my book on church history); and where I live in Utah, they are often called *community churches*. You will hear other names out there as well.

This branch is largest in our nation by far, but it is found throughout the world. Outside of our nation, many churches that are not part of denominations often become prey to the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement as well as other heretical groups because many of the pastors and members are very new Christians and don't understand all of the theological issues involved. This is not to say that the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is not a huge problem in our country. It certainly is. But, there are far more godly churches in this branch in our nation than in other parts of the world.

The final thing I would like to say here is that there are a number of churches worldwide that for all intents and purposes function as Independent Bible churches despite being part of a denomination. They do not really believe in denominations or agree with many of the doctrines and practices of their denomination, but remain in their

denomination for any number of reasons. I think that churches that do this are part of this branch of the Christian tree, despite being odd cases (although there are actually a lot of churches like this worldwide). Further, I think they are being inconsistent and are creating a lot of confusion for the body of Christ. With that said, as long as they love Jesus and show this by their orthodoxy and their actions, I gladly accept them as true churches of Jesus.

- 1.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of predestination, but most reject the Reformed view.
- 2.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe, but most hold to the young earth view.
- 3.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of Spirit baptism, but most hold to the traditional view.
- 4.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of infant baptism, but most reject infant baptism.
- 5.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of the Lord's Supper, but most hold to the view that the bread and wine/grape juice are simply symbols.
- 6.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of art and symbols in church services, but most adopt the view that they should be minimal.
- 7.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches hold to the congregational model of church government for the most part, but specifically reject the need for denominations. This latter aspect to their theology is the core distinguishing mark of this branch of the Christian tree.
- 8.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of the Sabbath, but most hold to the view that it is no longer binding today.
- 9.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the question of missions, but the overwhelming vast majority hold to the view that foreign missions should be highly emphasized in the church.

- 10.) The Confessional Independent Bible Churches allow for freedom on the end times, but the vast majority are premillennial. And most are Semi-Dispensational as well. Further, most hold to the view that the rapture will take place before the tribulation, separately from the full second coming.

The Confessional Charismatics

This final branch of the Christian tree today was started in the 1960's by Dennis Bennett in Southern California. He was an Episcopalian and the movement he started mostly took place within established denominations. Over time though, parts of the movement broke off from these denominations and began forming new Confessional Charismatic denominations. However, there are still a number of people who consider themselves Charismatic in theology that are part of other branches of the Christian tree. The two most notable Confessional Charismatic denominations today are the Calvary Chapel movement and the Association of Vineyard Churches. The Calvary Chapel movement does not like to be called a denomination, but it is clearly not a movement in the technical sense as I have defined that term in this work. It is an official organization of churches that all agree on certain core doctrines, and therefore it is definitely a denomination as I have defined that term. With that said, when not being technical we should respect their desire for us not to call them a denomination. This is why I usually refer to them as a movement in the more broad and non-technical sense.

- 1.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the issue of predestination, but most hold to the non-Reformed view.
- 2.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the question of evolution and the age of the universe, but most hold to the young universe view.
- 3.) The Confessional Charismatics hold to the Charismatic view of Spirit baptism.
- 4.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the question of infant baptism, but most reject the doctrine.
- 5.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom concerning the Lord's Supper, but most hold to the only symbols view.

- 6.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the question of art and symbols in church services, but most hold to the view that they should be minimal.
- 7.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the question of church government.
- 8.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the question of the Sabbath, but most hold to the view that it is not binding after Pentecost.
- 9.) The Confessional Charismatics hold to the view that foreign missions should be highly emphasized in the church today.
- 10.) The Confessional Charismatics allow for freedom on the end times, but most are premillennial, Semi-Dispensational, and believe that the rapture will precede the tribulation as a separate event from the full second coming of Jesus.

Conclusion

It is important to note that when I say that this or that branch allows for freedom on this or that issue, I am not at all saying that every denomination and church within that branch allows for freedom on that issue. Many of the denominations and churches within the various branches staunchly do not allow for freedom on many of the issues where I said the overarching branch allows for freedom. But these churches and denominations for the most part still understand that they are part of a broader branch that has other churches and denominations within it that do hold different views on certain subjects. With all that said, if a church or denomination holds to infant baptism and wants to call itself *Baptist*, everyone agrees that this would be a very confused church or denomination. But, unfortunately, this confusion sometimes does exist. For example, the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination is a very small denomination that is truly Christian, but is not Confessional Presbyterian despite the name. Confessional Presbyterians have always held to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, but this denomination does not. Therefore, Confessional Presbyterians like myself feel that this denomination only creates confusion.

There are also churches that call themselves “BaptiCostal.” They are trying to indicate that they are both Baptist and Pentecostal, but most Confessional Baptists and Confessional Pentecostals (along with most true Christians for that matter) believe that they are only creating confusion in the church. If they are not part of a denomination, they should say that they are part of the Independent Bible Churches branch, and that they hold to the position that rejects infant baptism and are also Pentecostal in their theology concerning Spirit baptism. If they are part of a Confessional Pentecostal denomination and are really trying to emphasize the importance of rejecting infant baptism, they should still call themselves *Confessional Pentecostal*, but ones that strongly adhere to the doctrine that infant baptism is not biblical in their estimation. And if they are part of a Baptist denomination, as most are, they should simply say that they are part of the Confessional Baptist branch, but hold to Pentecostal theology on the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Next, do not listen to those who try to slander God’s true church by saying that it is divided beyond all comprehension because there are thousands of denominations. What these liars are not telling you is that the statistics are often skewed to make it seem like there are far more denominations than there actually are. For instance, many will count as many independent churches as possible because they are not part of any broader denomination. They say that because each of these churches are independent, they are their own denomination! This is absurd because the Independent Bible Churches branch is made up of thousands of independent churches because they do not believe in denominations, but that hardly makes each one of these independent churches its own denomination. Other methods count each denomination as it exists in each country. So, they will count the Roman Catholic Church multiple times because it exists in every country of the world. And there are over 200 countries in the world. But the Roman Catholic Church is not one denomination in one country and another one in another country. This is false. And as far as the true church is concerned, the Roman Catholic Church shouldn’t be counted at all! And that is true for many of the other so-called denominations that often get counted but are not Conservative Evangelical.

Further, most of the branches believe that it is best to have different denominations in each country because each country is so different. This way each

denomination can focus on the problems and issues that face their churches as part of their specific nation. But because there are over 200 countries in the world, this often leads to a number of denominations that are often hardly different from each other at all because they are all part of the same branch. So, when you take 10 branches and start multiplying that by over 200, you are of course going to get a number in the thousands. But, as stated, many of these denominations are almost identical because they are part of the same branch. And as discussed earlier, many of the branches themselves are almost identical. I am not trying to minimize the differences between the branches. They are real and important. And I am not trying to minimize the number of denominations. There are too many and we should try to shrink the number. With all that said, the problem is not nearly as big as our critics make out. As Conservative Evangelicals, we simply do not believe that all of God's true churches have to be organizationally united to be true churches and for the true church to do God's work on earth. Therefore, pointing out that there are a lot of denominations when we do not believe it needs to be otherwise, is often a very silly argument and criticism.

Finally, beware of two dangerous errors that are unfortunately far too common in the church today. The first concerns those who want to make everything under the sun heresy. They tend to call every single doctrine out there that they disagree with heresy. And they believe that everyone who is not a part of their small movement is either not saved or is to be avoided. This is divisive and thoroughly unbiblical. Many who engage in this error are not saved and are acting like the Pharisees of old. We can vigorously debate secondary doctrines with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in certain contexts as long as we don't get too heated. We can even say that in our strong opinion they believe in serious errors. But, we should not call these errors *heresy*. These are important issues and so these debates are good and healthy. But, we should never divide over secondary issues. We must embrace and work with our fellow true Christians as much as possible. Now, to be fair, some true and non-divisive brothers and sisters in Christ do use the term *heresy* in a very broad sense to describe any doctrine that is unbiblical in their estimation. But, they are clear to say that they do not believe all that hold to these "heretical" doctrines are not saved. I strongly disagree with

this position as I believe it only creates confusion, but we must still accept these Christians as our brothers and sisters.

The second dangerous error concerns those who want to say that doctrine is pretty much no big deal. Many of them will say that we should accept Roman Catholics, LDS folks, and many other heretical groups as our brothers and sisters in Christ. And many of them will say that we should never debate or even hardly discuss secondary issues. They label all such debates and defenses as divisive. This is wrong as it gives the enemy free reign in certain churches and he takes full advantage. Many churches along these lines end up in complete chaos. Many end up embracing Progressive Christianity or some form of the Pseudo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. Many of these “Christians” are not truly saved and are hurting the church very badly. Further, they often cause many ignorant true Christians to not preach the gospel to people who so desperately need it. They will often make you feel guilty for taking doctrine seriously. Both of these dangerous errors must be avoided.

I so hope that this book has helped you to better understand the branches of the Christian tree today. I also hope that this book will help you to begin to come to your own doctrinal conclusions. Now that you know what are the main things true Christians tend to disagree over, you can begin to study these issues in more depth and come to your own positions. God bless you as you seek Him and His truth further!