

## What Really Divides Churches?

### Principles of Bible Study

**Intro:** This is just a refresher. Please see the instructor for additional helpful resources! Satan uses three main arenas (traceable to Satan's manifesto in the garden of Eden) to confuse men about God's truth.

**Today's Goal:** We can reduce the entire discussion regarding religion in general, churches, and Bible interpretation into three simple issues. We can respond to each of these issues with one simple answer. Obviously, because we are dealing with issues, we'll mention a few groups along the way, to better equip us when we converse with each other.

**Today's Outline:** I. The Issue of Authority, II. The Issue of Interpretation, and III. The Issue of Obedience. Each of these categories will include simple principles which we will number as we go along.

### I. The Issue of Authority S4

**Principle #1 Always accept the Bible as your ONLY authority. S5**

**Common false claims to church authority:** Those who claim their church alone is approved by God, and those who claim their leaders have additional truth from God. Ironically, these are the very groups that make the biggest issue about churches being divided! S6

All these false claims have the same thing in common - they rob the Bible of its true authority. Arguments folks use when claiming their church is the only church include "My church is the PURE church...is the historic church...was specially chosen by God...has the only true gospel!" S7 S8 S9

Unlike true Bible believers, these groups claim: 1.) Multiple authorities – in addition to the Bible, 2.) The right of Succession, or 3) both. All of them are cultic. S10

- Roman Catholics are M & S
- Churches of Christ are S
- LDS are M & S
- Some Baptists are S
- Adventists are M

The Biblical position on church authority. All of God's redeemed belong to Christ's universal church, regardless of their earthly affiliations. Members of local earthly assemblies belong to local churches which should consist only of true believers alone. S11

As an example, successionist Baptist groups (such as Primitive and Landmark) believe every member of their church has been baptized in a succeeding chain from John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. What happens when these claims are made? All they alone claim the right to preach, teach, baptize, conduct the Lord's table, and evangelize. All other groups are called "alien." These folks claim to be the true bride of Christ and the true body of Christ. S13

**Catholics, Mormons, Churches of Christ, and other self-labeled "independent Baptists" ALL assume that Jesus Christ gave His Great Commission to His church on earth instead of giving it to individual members of His body, the church.** See Colossians 1:18. S18 S19 S20 S21

Jesus Christ alone is the head of His church, and no church can save you. See Ephesians 5:23, S22 S23

• A man becomes a part of Christ's church when he becomes a part of Christ's body. That man is placed into the body of Christ when he receives Christ as Savior. See 1 Corinthians 12:12,13. **S24 S25 S26**

Our simple solution: Principle #1. Always accept the Bible as your ONLY authority. Matthew 4:3. **S27 S28**

## **II. The Issue of Interpretation S29**

### **Principle #2 Always interpret the Bible literally. S30**

Do not believe the big lie. Anyone can understand God's Word! Satan wants you to believe the Bible is confusing, that no one can be sure what the Bible says, and that only church leaders should interpret the Bible. **S31**

There are only two approaches to Bible interpretation. The only correct view is literal interpretation. The only incorrect view is allegorical or selective interpretation. **S32**

**Literal interpreters teach:** "When the plain sense of the Bible makes common sense to seek any other sense is nonsense." (Alva J. McClain). This means: The Bible conveys spiritual truth through literal words with literal meanings. When the Bible DOES use figures and metaphors, their meanings can be discovered elsewhere in God's Word. NO BIBLE TRUTH EVER left to the opinion of the interpreters. **S33**

Good rules for literal interpretation caution us: Never "spiritualize" Bible verses. Never "spiritualize" Bible truths. Never confuse God's program for Israel with God's program for the church. As a Bible teacher, I see these simple rules broken on an almost daily basis. **S34 S35**

**Allegorical interpreters.** Allegorical or selective interpreters have been around since post captivity. Allegorism began to be embraced by Christians thanks to Origin and Augustine. Allegorical interpreters claim that spiritual meanings of a text supersede literal meanings. The problem then arises, who determines the true spiritual meaning. As Augustine saw this difficulty coming, he taught that the church should be the final authority when it comes to determining "the rule of faith." Since Augustine, many allegorical interpreters have mixed the literal statements of God's Word with their fanciful interpretations, dividing the body and creating party loyalty. **S36 S37 S38**

**The plain fact:** Every significant theological difference found between churches today can be traced to the practice of mixing allegorical and literal interpretation in various amounts. **S39**

**An example of a bad mix:** The Bible says there is a real hell with real fire in it (Luke 16:23). Allegorists often teach that Luke 16 is only a picture of emotional suffering, and that God would never send men to eternal torment. **S40 S41 S42**

**Other examples of bad mixes:** The Bible says that salvation is by grace through faith, that baptism and the Lord's table are for believers. Allegorists commonly teach that salvation is by grace plus works, infant baptism pre-regenerates believers, and that Christ actually exists in the bread and wine of the Lord's table. **S43**

Our third and fourth principles are mentioned only briefly, but they become important in advanced interpretation.

### **Principle #3 Behind every Bible figure or symbol there is a literal reality. S44**

Allegorists like to suggest that literal interpreters are really hyper literalists who deny the existence of figures of speech and metaphors. So, perhaps, we should be looking for an actual physical gate to enter when Jesus commanded us to the straight gate (Matthew 7:13). That is silliness. However, literalists do believe that behind every biblical figure or symbol there is a literal reality. There are no "free standing metaphors" which do not correspond to real things. Nothing is a figure of the imagination. More importantly:

**Principle #4 Symbols and metaphors are used to illuminate existing Bible realities.** In other words, a picture is worth a thousand words. It helps to illuminate a reality we already know exists. We never establish a doctrine with figures or metaphors, we only illuminate doctrines which are taught literally elsewhere. **S45**

Do not be frustrated by, *“There are so many interpretations, no one can really know what the Bible says for sure!”*

Nonsense, you have one of two choices. You can either interpret the Bible literally or you can add your own creativity to the mix and mix the leaven of allegorical interpretation into the lump. Simple literal interpreters always end up with the same general conclusions. Allegorical interpreters split off into a wide world of doctrinal confusion.

**The simple solution: Take God’s Word literally.**

### **III. The Issue of Obedience S46**

#### **Principle #5 Obey the TRUTH God has shown you in His Word. S47**

This is no small matter. The whole doctrine of biblical epistemology lies behind this doctrine. Jesus said: *“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”* John 7:17. Be certain, our Lord blinds the eyes of those who toy with the Word of God, allowing them to follow the precipitous path of destruction. Never ever study God’s Word while intentionally denying or disobeying any portion of it. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit does convince and convince Bible readers concerning Christ and judgment to come. However, nothing blinds the spiritual eyes like presumptuous sin and disobedience.

#### **Principle #6 Obey God’s WISDOM. Submit your wisdom to God’s wisdom and let the Bible explain itself! S48**

Keep in mind that this is exactly what Satan did to Eve. He convinced her that she could match her moral values with God’s and, in the process, an heir to higher knowledge. All false religion is based on this premise. *“We have the higher knowledge.”* The scriptures warn us consistently about this matter of falling prey to our own corrupted reasoning. (Isaiah 55:6-9, 1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

Home and coffee shop group Bible studies are always warmly welcomed and appreciated. However, it is a dangerous thing when folks come together to share their ignorance, or worse their opinions on scripture, rather than benefiting from the godly pastors and teachers God has raised up. We all do well to remember the words of one seminary professor who repeatedly instructed *“Don’t tell me what you think it says, tell me what it says!”* S49

What are some tools to help me understand what the text actually says? First, always read the context! **Many answers to your questions can be found by reading a few verses before or after the passage which is in question. Other answers to your questions will be found in other books of the bible.** Secondly, learn to use cross references and learn to use concordances. As we grow in Bible study, we discover there is a world of tools at our finger tips – tools which will help us submit our wisdom to God’s wisdom. S50 S51

When it comes to obedience, our next principle is possibly the most ignored of all!

#### **Principle #7 Let the Bible explain your experience; never let your experience explain the Bible! S52**

**Here are some commonly heard statements:** *“You can never take my spiritual encounter away from me!”* *“I know I am a Christian because I speak in tongues,”* or *“I know I am right because I have experienced a miracle!”* In reality, most, if not all false religions claim these things. Satan is an angel of light (when required) 2 Corinthians 11:14. S53 S54 S55 S56

**Another experiential statement:** *“You can never take my baptism from me.”* Fact: Baptism has never once saved a baby, a child, a man, or a woman. Baptism is not pre-regeneration and is not a form of pre-conversion! 1 Corinthians 1:17. S57 S58 S59

**Another experiential statement:** *“This is my witness and I know I am right because I have a burning in my bosom.”* A true believer would never base his hope on a physical response. Satan can duplicate those feelings and emotions. We have something surer! A true witness says *“I know I am right because I am resting on the promise of God!”* (Hebrews 4:12) S60 S61 S62

**Another experiential statement:** *"I must be right because I have PEACE about what I am doing."* However, the Bible says that your conclusion must be based on the Word of God or there is no light in you! (Isaiah 8:20) **S63 S64**

**Another experiential statement:** *"I know the Bible says this is wrong, but God understands my problem."* No, He does not. There is no respect of persons with God, no exceptions, and no fudging. (Romans 2:11) **S65 S66**

**Another experiential statement:** *"God could never forgive me. I am too great a sinner!"* Jesus said He would never send anyone away who comes to Him. You are not the world's worst sinner, and even if you were, you can be saved today. Your false humility makes Jesus Christ a liar. (John 6:37) **S67 S68**

Let's finish these principles up:

**Principle #8 A Bible Passage has only ONE Interpretation.** **S69**

**A commonly misinterpreted verse:** 2 Chronicles 7:14 **S70 S71**

The correct interpretation: **This Promise was made to God's people Israel - a theocratic kingdom. It was NOT made to the U.S.A.** However, there is a correct application: **It is both right and proper to pray for ours or any nation and to seek national repentance in disobedient times.** (Psalm 9:17-19)

**A commonly misinterpreted passage:** Ezekiel 37:16-19. **S72 S73 S74**

The correct interpretation: **The sticks represent the houses of Judah and Joseph. They will become one (be reunited).**  
The erroneous interpretation: **"The writings of the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon will be joined as one book"**. Try to make that one work! This is a subtle attempt to accommodate for the many contradictions between God's revealed Word and the Book of Mormon by kicking the can down the road. **S75**

A Bible passage has one interpretation. When we break this rule we can make the Bible say anything we want and we dishonor and disobey God. **S76**

**Let's list the three issues and the eight principles!** **S77**

**I. The Issue of Authority.** – The solution. Let the Bible be our only source of spiritual truth and authority.

*Principle #1 Always accept the Bible as your ONLY authority*

**II. The Issue of Interpretation** – Be a literal interpreter and never kowtow to allegorical interpreters.

*Principle #2 Always interpret the Bible literally.*

*Principle #3 Behind every Bible figure or symbol there is a literal reality.*

*Principle #4 Symbols and metaphors are used to illuminate existing Bible realities.*

**III. The Issue of Obedience** – Never impose your will or opinion on God's Word and obey what He says!

*Principle #5 Obey the TRUTH God has shown you in His Word.*

*Principle #6 Obey God's WISDOM. Submit your wisdom to God's wisdom.*

*Principle #7 Let the Bible explain your experience; never let your experience explain the Bible!*

*Principle #8 A Bible Passage has only ONE Interpretation.*