

CHAPTER 12

Divisions in the Church

As we study the pages of church history we soon learn a very sad fact. The Church, instead of being UNITED, has been **divided** again and again. Repeatedly we find one group breaking off from another group and forming a new group. Before long the new group splits and finds itself divided. In the year 1054 the Church was divided into two parts: 1) The Greek Eastern Church 2) The Roman Western Church. This Western Church soon became known as the Roman Catholic Church.

Other divisions were to follow. The Protestant Reformation had its beginnings in 1517 (see Chapter 10). Soon after this many people broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and many new groups formed. Later more divisions took place and more new groups formed. Today there are thousands of groups and denominations and churches that call themselves "Christians." To see this for yourself, take your phone book and look in the "Yellow Pages" under CHURCHES. What do you find? Do you find ONE UNITED CHURCH or do you find **many** different churches, groups and denominations? Why can't all "Christians" get along with each other and be part of the same church? When the Lord Jesus prayed for His church He made this request: "THAT THEY ALL MAY BE _____ (John 17:21). What happened? Why do we not have a united, unified Church on earth today? Why do we find the churches DIVIDED instead of UNITED?

Man is to Blame, Not God!

Think for a moment about yourself and your friends and other young people your age, whether in school or in church. One day we say, "You are my friend!" The next day something happens and we say, "Sorry, you're not my friend!" We include certain ones in our group of friends but others we exclude. We are friendly towards some but not so friendly towards others. We have our own little group where some are welcome and some are not welcome. As a result we have CLIQUES and CLUBS and CLOSED GROUPS OF FRIENDS. We have DIVISION! How does this happen? Why does this happen? Who is to blame? Are **you** part of the problem?

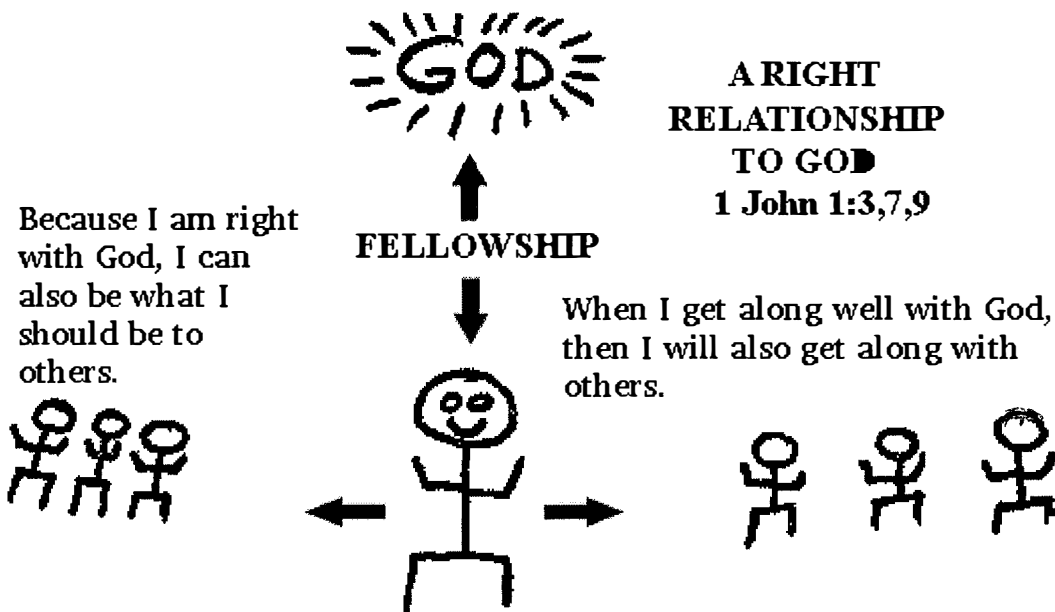
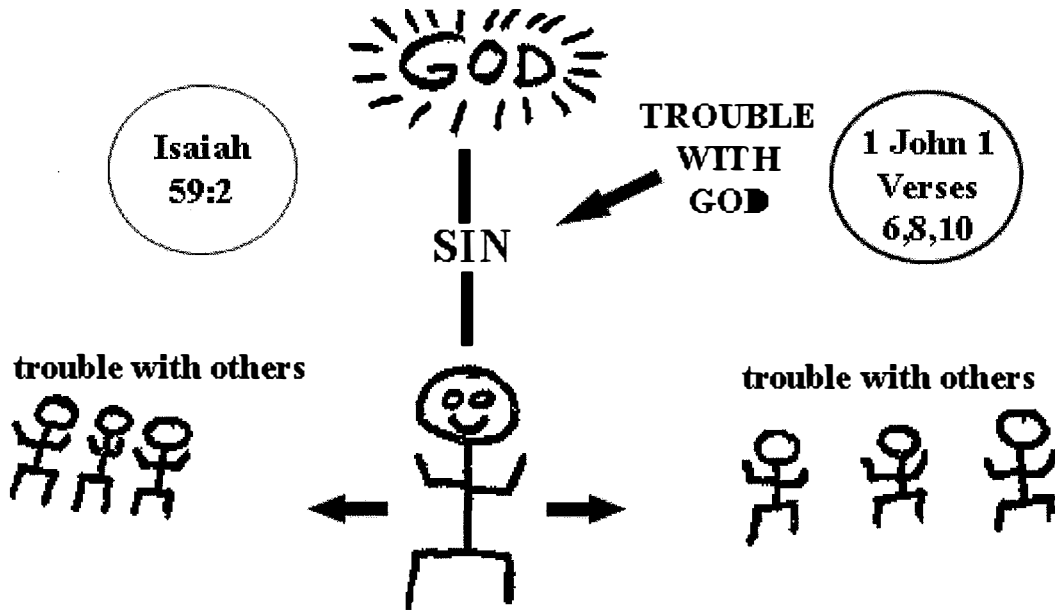
The churches are divided. These divisions do exist and we need to recognize them and understand them. God did not bring about these divisions; **man did**. These schisms and divisions exist BECAUSE OF MAN...

- man's ignorance
- man's failure
- man's pride
- man's lust for power and position
- man's selfishness
- man wanting to do **his own thing in his own way**

Divisions come about because of MAN'S FAILURE TO STAY RIGHT WITH GOD. If men would keep in a right relationship with God then they would also be in a right relationship with

each other and there would be a UNITY and a ONENESS. In order for men to have fellowship with each other, who must they **first** have fellowship with (1 John 1:3)?

When people are not right with God they will not be right with other people. The VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP (with God) determines the HORIZONTAL RELATIONSHIP (with others):



When something is wrong with the horizontal relationship (WITH OTHERS) then this ought to tell us that something is wrong with the vertical relationship (WITH GOD). The best way to get along well with someone is to make sure that you are getting along well with God.

Consider 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (compare also 1 Cor. 1:10-13). Why were there divisions and schisms and cliques in the Corinthian church? What caused these problems? Was the VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP what it should have been (1 Cor. 3:3)? _____ Were these Corinthians in a right relationship with the Lord? _____ With each other? _____

Consider the man DIOTREPHES who is described in 3 John verses 9-11. Did this man have a right relationship with other believers? _____ Do you think he had a right relationship with the Lord? _____ Do you think this man was even saved (3 John 11)? _____ Those who have PEOPLE PROBLEMS actually have a much more serious problem: A GOD PROBLEM. They need to get things right between God and them, and then the Lord will begin to help them be what they should be with others.

Unity in the Early Church

Jump in a time machine and go back to the days of the Apostle Paul (the first century A. D.). What would you find? Would you find thousands and thousands of different denominations and groups and churches all teaching different things? If you were to visit the church at Corinth and the church at Jerusalem and the church at Antioch, what would you find? Would you find three different churches all "doing their own thing"? No, instead you would find three churches each pointing to the same Christ, proclaiming the same gospel and practicing the same truth. The churches were in different locations but they each had the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, the same Holy Scriptures and the same burning desire to do God's will and obey Christ's commands. If you had lived in the first century and had to move from Philippi to Ephesus, you would have found the same kind of church in Ephesus as you had left in Philippi. If an unsaved person were to travel from Rome to Thessalonica, he would not say, "Oh, this church in Thessalonica is so very different from the church in Rome." No, instead he would say, "The believers here in Thessalonica are just like those I knew in Rome!" Believers in both of these cities pointed to the same Christ and to the same Bible:

See the illustration on the next page.



SAME TEACHING-	"as I teach every where in every _____" (1 Corinthians 4:17)
SAME PRACTICE-	"as the Lord hath called everyone, so let him walk. And so ordain I in _____" (1 Corinthians 7:17)
SAME CUSTOM-	"But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the _____ of _____" (1 Corinthians 11:16).
SAME ORDER -	"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all _____ of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Do we find this same UNITED VOICE today? As we walk up and down our land and visit different churches today, what do we find? Do we find the SAME teaching and practices and customs and order or do we find GREAT DIFFERENCES? _____
 Something has happened! Something has failed and gone wrong! (Have you gone on vacation with your family and had trouble finding a good church or even finding any kind of church which still believes and teaches the Bible?)

Today's Confusion

Today the situation is quite different than it was in the first century. Many churches have moved away from the Bible and moved away from the God of the Bible. Churches have been divided and have split and new churches have formed. Today there are thousands of different kinds of churches. Some of these churches are good, and many are not so good. Some churches today still believe and teach the Bible. Many other churches no longer believe the Bible (even though they may still use the Bible or read from the Bible), and they do not teach people what the Bible says about how to get to heaven.

The devil has successfully brought about much confusion in our day. People look at all the different kinds of churches and all the different kinds of religions and they say things like this:

"There are so many churches, and they all believe different things, so I suppose it does not really matter what a person believes."

"All of these churches are telling people how to get to God, so there must be many ways to get to God."

"All of these churches interpret the Bible differently. The Bible seems to mean different things to different people. The Bible must be a very confusing Book!"

"All these churches teach different things. Who can know the truth? Who can know what is right?"

God has not changed. The Bible has not changed. The truth has not changed, but the devil has done very well at causing confusion and the truth of God seems lost in the middle of all the mess!

What would you say to someone who said, "There are so many religions that it seems impossible to find out what the truth really is"?

How would you answer this: "It is all right to believe anything you want to believe as long as you are sincere!"?

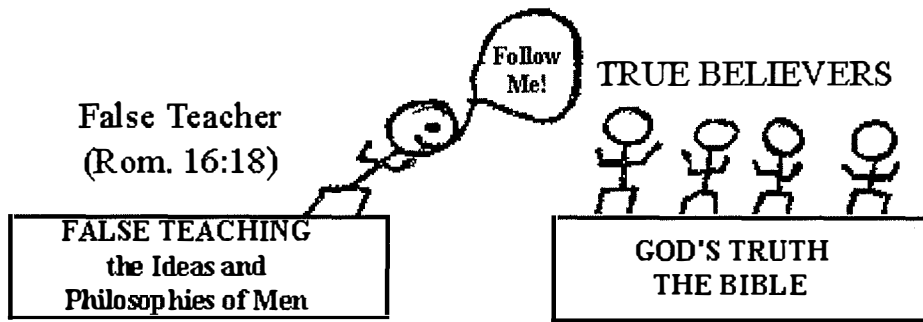
Divisions Are Sometimes Good

Divisions are sometimes good and needed. If you had cancer in your body, would you want this cancer to remain in your body or would you want to have a doctor cut it out and get rid of it? The healthiest thing a person can do is to get rid of the cancer. The same is true with the church. Sometimes the best thing that can happen to a church is for certain people to LEAVE IT! If they were to stay in the church they would destroy it.

In 1 John 2:19 we learn about certain people who LEFT the church. These people never really belonged to the church. They were not really saved. By their leaving, the church was not HURT; it was HELPED!

Consider carefully Romans 16:17. God tells us to "M_____ them which cause _____ and offences contrary to the _____ (teaching) which ye have learned; and _____ them." These people are trying to bring FALSE TEACHING into the church. They CAUSE division because they refuse to stand on God's truth. We must avoid such people:

See the illustration on the next page.



**He wants to cause DIVISION.
 God says "AVOID HIM" (Rom. 16:17)**

What would happen to the churches if such men were **not** avoided? What would happen to the person who allows the cancer to remain and grow in the body? What would happen to the church that allows false teaching to remain and spread among the members of the body (the church)?

Never LEAVE the TRUTH. If others want UNITY they must come and stand on the truth with you. Never sacrifice the TRUTH for anything. Never LEAVE THE TRUTH for the sake of UNITY (this is what the ecumenical movement is doing today). Always stand on the Bible. If others want to stand with you, that's fine. If not, don't leave where you are standing to join them!

We need to be so right and so true that those who are wrong will find it necessary to break off from us. Those who are hindering and hurting the cause of true Christian unity are those who REFUSE to stand faithfully and obediently upon all of the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation.

Remember, many people walked away from the Lord Jesus because they refused to stand on the truth and follow the Lord's teaching. This is illustrated in John chapter 6:

From 5,000 to 11

John 6:10	How many men? _____
John 6:24	They were _____ Jesus.
John 6:41	They were _____ at Him.
John 6:60	_____ of His disciples said, "This is an _____" (this is an issue that may cause division!)
John 6:66	_____ of His disciples _____ and walked with him _____
John 6:67	How many disciples? _____
John 6:71	How many disciples? _____

A Sinking Ship

If a ship is sinking the best thing to do is to get away from it (divide yourself from it) or else you will sink with it. Get in your life boat and get away from the ship that is going down. Don't try to stay with it.

There are some churches that are just like that sinking ship. These churches no longer believe the Bible and no longer preach salvation. They teach all kinds of things that are false. Instead of sinking with this ship, GET AWAY FROM IT (see 2 Cor. 6:14-18 and Rev. 18:4).

Here's another example. Consider a liver transplant. The liver is part of a body that is dying. Soon the person is dead. What should the liver do? If it stays with the dead body, it too will be dead. If it is removed from the dead body and quickly put into a living body (liver transplant operation), then it will continue to live. There are some people who are in dead churches. They need to get out of these dead churches and join themselves to a living, true Church where the Bible is believed and taught. Are you in a church where the Bible is taught and preached and believed? If not, what should you do? Should you stay in and try to improve the church or should you get out? What does God say (2 Cor. 6:17 and Rev. 18:4)?

The Ecumenical Movement

The churches are divided. Everyone knows this. In the 20th century and into the 21st century, efforts are being made to bring all of the churches back together again. This is called the ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT. Those involved in this movement are saying things like this:

"LET'S ALL UNITE. Let's FORGET OUR DIFFERENCES and all join together!"

"We must LOVE ONE ANOTHER and be divided no more!"

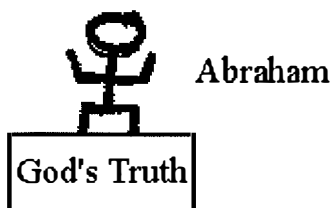
"It does not matter what we believe, AS LONG AS WE CAN ALL BE ONE!"

But remember, truth must never be sacrificed for the sake of UNITY. TRUTH is more important than UNITY. Which is more pleasing to God--to stand on the truth even if you are all alone or to stand on error along with thousands of others?

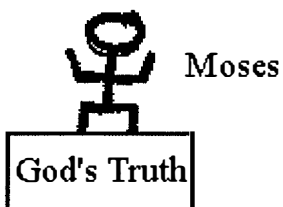
We must never THROW AWAY THE BIBLE so that we can have unity!

Divisions in the Old Testament

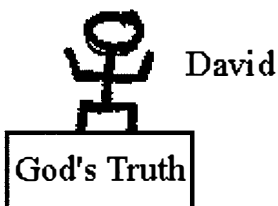
God is always looking for men who will stand on His truth and obey His Word. Divisions and difficulties come whenever men refuse to stand on the truth (when men lose the VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP with God):



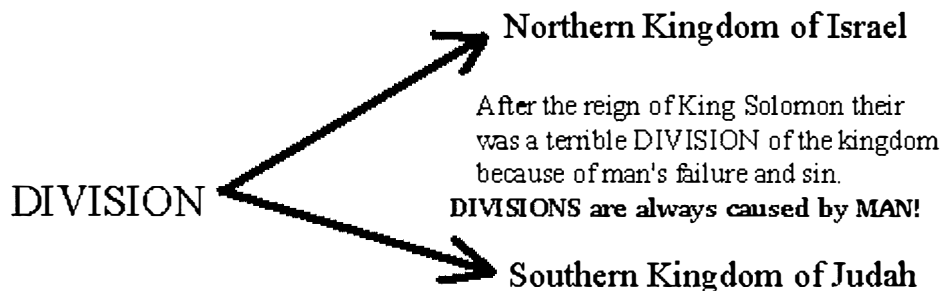
Abraham stood firmly on God's truth even though he came from a family that did not (see Joshua 24:2 which tells us that Abraham's father and grandfather served _____).



Moses stood on God's truth even though many of the children of Israel did not. Moses had a healthy vertical relationship with God (Hebrews 3:2).



David was "a man after God's own heart." He had a good and healthy VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD (as we can see by reading his Psalms!).



God is sovereign over all splits and divisions. Nothing that happens takes God by surprise. He knows all about the failures of men. God can even use such divisions in His grace and **longsuffering**. (God waits a long time before getting angry with us.) God knows that the great masses of people are not interested in standing on His truth, but God patiently waits for individuals who will hear His Word and stand firmly upon it. God is even waiting for you! Will you take your stand upon the Word of God? Will you be a part of that small REMNANT of people who take God's Word seriously (see Isaiah 66:2)? God is still looking for men like Abraham, Moses and David today.

Divisions Today

Today there are many different religions. There are many different races of people. There are many different ethnic groups (Italians, Polish, Hispanic groups, etc.). There are many different customs. All of these things and many more make for DIVISIONS among people. They all seem to want to stay in their own little groups.

God in His grace is able to SMASH DOWN these walls of division. In Galatians 3:28 we read: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond (slave) nor free, there is neither male nor female for ye are all _____ in Christ Jesus." When the VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP ("one in Christ") is what it should be then all of these other walls and barriers are smashed down. Of course, most people do not take care of the VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP and this is why we have all of the horizontal problems and divisions. We live in a DIVIDED WORLD where people are separated from God and thus from each other.

The Lord God certainly wants unity and oneness. This is what the Lord prayed for (John 17:21-23 and see Ephesians 4:3-6,13). In the future kingdom age there will not be hundreds of different religions on earth. There will be a UNITY of worship because all will worship the KING OF KINGS (see Zechariah 14:16), and those who do not worship God's King in God's way will be punished (see Zech.14:17-19). See also Isaiah 2:1-3. No cults or false religions will be allowed on the face of the earth.

During the tribulation period there will also be a UNITY of worship, but this will be the wrong kind of worship. The man of sin (ANTICHRIST) will not allow other religions. What is the form of worship that will be allowed by the ONE WORLD GOVERNMENT (see Revelation 13:4,8,12,15,16)?

Often people will UNITE together for a common cause or purpose. Herod and Pilate had hated each other but they both joined together in a common hatred of Jesus Christ and they became F_____ (Luke 23:12). During the Second World War many **different** countries joined together and united so that they could fight against Germany and Japan and defeat them. At the end of the tribulation people the **WHOLE WORLD WILL UNITE TOGETHER AGAINST GOD**. You can read about this in Psalm 2.

* * * * *

We have looked at past history (Israel in Old Testament days and the Church through its 2000 years of history) and we have looked at future history (prophecy about the tribulation and the millennium kingdom). May God help us to learn the important lessons of history. If we fail to learn from history we are bound to repeat its tragic mistakes. The great lessons of history are for the most part ignored today. As an example of this, on the television evening news, how often do the news commentators share with us the great lessons of history?

May we learn from history that whenever a person fails to have or maintain a healthy VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP with God, then divisions and difficulties will always come HORIZONTALLY. Will you UNITE yourself to God or will you be divided from Him? Will you stand on His truth and let God be your leader? Are you willing to hold on to the truth and never sacrifice it for anything? Is your relationship to others what it should be (parents, brothers, sisters, friends, etc.)? If not, perhaps your relationship with God is not what it should be.

ACROSS THE CENTURIES

