

Alberto Vivero, Wilfredo Pelino and Jonathan Sapitula of the Philippines are all preaching the gospel in difficult situations. Please pray for them and render any support you can to their efforts.

Remember our gospel meeting coming April 29 thru May 2 with Wayne Goff of the Roan Ridge congregation.

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APRIL 8, 2012

THE ANSWER TO RELIGIOUS DIVISION Jim Stauffer

There is great happiness and joy when one obeys the gospel of Christ and receives the forgiveness of his sins. However, that joy can quickly fade when the new Christian looks around him and sees all his friends rejecting the gospel in their lives.

His sorrow is soon increased when he observes other friends practicing a religion he cannot find when he searches the Scriptures. He is facing the same problems brethren have dealt with since the church was established in Acts 2. Paul told the Galatians to reject the perverted gospel of those brethren who wished to retain certain practices of Judaism. Jesus warned us about false teachers when He told us they were to be identified by the fruit they bore. **(Matthew 7:15ff)**

Shortly after the first century, error and confusion began to creep more and more into the church Jesus died to build. **(Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28)**

This apostasy continued through the centuries until the faithful were a minority of people scattered here and there in the interest of safety. The government took over the church and soon the church became the government until students of Scripture could no longer recognize it.

Our intent in this article is not to recount history but only to mention briefly how we came to our current situation. We live in a world of many different religions. Even in our own country there are so many different religions we cannot count them all. Our world is similar to that of God's people during the time of the Judges. **Judges 21:25** *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.* When God said this about His people, He was not pleased.

What then is the solution to the problem of religious division in the world today?

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MEETING TIMES
Sunday - Bible Classes: 9:30AM
Worship Services 10:20AM & 5:00PM
Wednesday - Bible Classes 7:00PM
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Any time men are divided over any issue they need a common guide or measurement. One that is true so they may set aside their opinions and join one another in accepting the truth. Joshua issued such a challenge to the people near the end of his life. **Joshua 24:15** *And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.*

He was calling them back to a common authority. It was not acceptable to worship idols like the peoples around them. This is the same solution we need today. We need very much to accept the complete authority of the Scriptures. **(2 Timothy 3:16,17)** We need to learn again *"to speak as the oracles of God"* **(1 Peter 4:11)**

Sometimes this is easier said than done. Are you ready to give up your personal ideas on pleasing God in order to obey His word? Are you still ready after reading there is: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism? **(Ephesians 4:4,5)** You see, we all think God's word is authoritative until it teaches contrary to what is practiced where we worship. When people have to choose between what the Scriptures say and what their denomination practices, it becomes very difficult to stand with the truth. Friends have to be left behind. Things we have done for years must be forsaken in order to follow the word of God.

We must be so committed to accepting only His word as authoritative we will cease to *"teach for doctrines the precepts of men."* **(Matthew 15:9)**

One mistake often made by members of religious denominations is to attempt to make corrections to that religious body by using the Scripture. It certainly sounds noble on the surface. Historically this proved to simply create more denominations. (See the results of the Reformation Period)

It is very difficult to repair a church that originated in the mind of a man. It is much easier and more efficient to go back to square one. Or in this case to the New Testament Church.

Jesus said He would build His church on the truth that He was the Son of God. **(Matthew 16:18)** This happened in the second chapter of the book of Acts just as the prophet Joel had prophesied hundreds of years before.

The Apostles taught men the gospel they preached was inspired by the Holy Spirit and had the power to save men from their sins. **(1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Romans 1:16)**

The gospel they preached is recorded in Scripture and specifically taught men to hear and believe the word of God. **(Romans 10:17)** Upon believing His word they taught we should repent of our sins, confess Jesus as Lord and be baptized for the remission of

sins. **(Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9,10)**

These things are clearly taught in Scripture by the Apostles Jesus selected, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit He sent to guide them into all truth. **(John 16:13)** In spite of what the Scriptures teach on these matters there are many religious denominations who do not teach or practice them today.

We will not please God until we accept His word as the authority in our lives. We must adopt the attitude of the Bereans. **Acts 17:11** *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.*

We must courageously practice what His word teaches and courageously teach what we practice.

"Easier Said Than Done"

We often use the old expression that something is "easier said than done." We know that it accurately applies to many different subjects. It is possible, for instance, to talk at length about sports, business, or world politics; but it is an entirely different matter to effectively engage in such activities. Even the things of day-to-day living are many times easier to discuss than to do. It is easy to say that I love my wife, but it is more difficult to prove that love by exhibiting genuine care and concern. I can talk about being a proper father to my children, but I must work hard to be the kind of parent that I ought to be. In all of these things, and a multitude of others, we see that it really is "easier said than done."

Living as God would have us to live is this same way. It is simple to claim a faith in Christ, and nearly as easy to say that we really love Him. A majority of folks in our society make such claims. But it is an altogether different matter to prove these statements. The real proof is in our performance as His disciples. Jesus put it most simply when He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). John added, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Let us do more than claim we are Christ's, that's easy. Let's prove we really love Him by obeying His commands.

• ***by Greg Gwin***

There'll be no ragweed in heaven
For those who enjoy a new birth
Cause Satan has used all his power
Creating our misery on earth

Grant Clothier