

Bible Special 06-10-17b

Let's pick up our study now. We're going to try to get specific now about Christian denominations, keeping in mind the things that we have talked about earlier, and that's the why of denominations. We're going to talk now about the how, how they came into existence.

But the why, as you will see, is always that people stop looking at the Scriptures and get to looking at each other and get to looking at themselves and deciding that they've got to somehow help God in some way. Christianity began when? What year would you say Christianity began? Roughly. Roughly 30 A.D., right? Jesus was born somewhere before zero, which is not a year.

One of the problems in calculating B.C. and A.D. is there's no zero year and it throws all the math off. If you take a B.C. date and an A.D. date and try to calculate the years, you always have to add one because there's no zero year. But Jesus was born, it depends on who you listen to, nobody knows for sure.

I like to guess that it was about 4 B.C. Herod the Great died, most historians think, in 4 B.C. although I think there's some new evidence that thinks he died after that. Anyway, we'll say 30 A.D., 30, 33, take your pick. That's when Christianity begins.

It's the day of Pentecost, isn't it? It's the first feast of Pentecost after the crucifixion, after Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Firstfruits, and so on, 50 days, Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descends, all the Christians are there, and you have the outpouring of God's Spirit. Where? Where does Christianity begin? What city? Jerusalem.

Nobody got the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, except the people who were in Jerusalem observing the Feast of Pentecost. How many Gentiles got the Spirit on the day of Pentecost? Zero. No Gentiles.

It was a Jewish event on a Jewish holiday in the capital of the Jewish nation. Just so you know. How much room is there in Christianity for anti-Semitism? It's just about the same amount.

Zero. Anti-Semitism, especially amongst Christians, is just about the stupidest thing you can imagine. For crying out loud, the Bible was written by Jews.

The Lord Jesus Christ is a Jew. They're God's chosen people. What's the matter with you? If you're anti-Semitic, you're a nutcase, and you ought to be locked up somewhere and made to study the Bible from Genesis to Revelation for about the rest of your natural life.

Well, anyway, I don't want to get off on that. But Christianity began in Jerusalem, circa 30 A.D., and the initial group of Christians were all Jews. First generation, all Jews.

Now, you know what this reminds me of? It reminds me of the birth of the Israelite nation, because the Israelites marched out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb, led by

Moses. All were baptized as they went through the Reed Sea, the Yam Suph. Went out there in the desert, and they dropped like flies.

And only two of them ever crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, into the land of promise. Caleb and Joshua. Two out of the entire generation made it past death to enter into the land.

Two of them. One guy and the other guy. Two of them.

The rest of the generation sort of missed it. What happened to the first generation of Jewish Christians? They fumbled the ball. The church in Jerusalem suffered.

It dwindled. It became poverty stricken. The Gentiles, how embarrassing.

You start out. You're going great guns. All your flags are flying.

The Holy Spirit has come down like a dove. You've got Peter, James, John, and all the other apostles there. You've got 11 apostles to help you get the church off the ground in Jerusalem.

And within a generation, the church in Jerusalem is gone. It crumbles and dies and atrophies away. The Gentiles wind up taking up collections and passing the hat and sending money back to the church in Jerusalem.

The Apostle Paul gets all messed up trying to participate in that effort instead of doing his job of spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. He wants to go back and minister to the Jews in Jerusalem, his own people. I'm a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Well, you're supposed to be out there being a Gentile to the Gentiles. I'm all things to all men so that by all means I can win some. But he got tangled up in that collection for the Jews.

He wanted to go march in triumph and be accepted. And at last they would say, Ah, Paul, we had you all wrong. You really are a good guy.

And he got all messed up with that. Ended up going to Rome and getting his head chopped off. But this is where Christianity began.

Now, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Christianity is left in the hands of the Gentiles. This is why a lot of historians... Now listen, if you hear people talking about Christianity, they'll say, you know what? Christianity was invented by Paul. Paul is the guy that wrote the book, literally, on Christianity.

Jesus was just sort of a happy, shabby, kind of a rambling rabbi who ran around saying a bunch of impossible things. Turn the other cheek. Bless the children.

Love your neighbor. Golden rule. Then he got killed.

And that would have been the end of it. But you have this guy, Paul. And Paul repackaged the message of Jesus.

And he couldn't sell it to the Jews, and so he repackaged it some more, and sold it to the Gentiles. And that's how Christianity got started. Paul invented it, pretty much all by himself.

What's the truth? The first generation of the Church is much like the first generation in Israel. They were given this great opportunity, and they dropped the ball. They died in the wilderness.

They didn't enter into God's rest. They didn't seize and lay hold of what eleven apostles were there to teach them. What did Jesus tell his disciples? You shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and Judea, and Samaria.

That's the southern kingdom and the northern kingdom of Israel. You eleven. Judas, for obvious reasons, not a part of that group.

The other eleven. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria. That's your bailiwick.

How much Christianity is left in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria by the time Jerusalem falls? Why do you think Jerusalem falls? Same principle why Sodom fell. There weren't enough believers left for God to preserve the city. It went out under discipline.

Christianity crumbled and died in Israel. It is the Gentiles, the Johnny-come-latelys, the second-class citizens, the ones that were despised by the first generation. They are the ones who go marching into the land of promise, as it were, in terms of Christian faith.

The ones nobody thought would make it. Remember how the Israelites, when they went out of Egypt, oh, you brought us and our children out here to die. Our children are all going to die.

We're going to starve. No water, no food, no leadership. Golden calf, on and on and on.

And yet, it's those little children who the parents thought were so helpless and were never going to make it. Those are the ones that go into the land and they themselves all died. Well, there's a real parallel in the early history of Christianity.

So, Christianity takes root and blossoms and faith bears fruit in Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Corinth, all of the places where Paul went and ministered in Asia Minor. Remember the missionary journeys that we studied in the book of Acts. The work that the apostle John winds up doing in the latter part of his life when there's nothing left to do in Jerusalem because there is no church, there is no Israel anymore.

The Romans have stamped it into non-existence. Then, John goes up and ministers to those seven churches in Asia. And there is a blossoming, a fruiting out of that tree amongst the Gentiles.

For a thousand years, Christianity spreads and radiates outward in and through and beyond the Roman Empire. And so, there's just one sort of Christianity. Now, there are some perversions of Christianity.

There are some heresies that pop up from the outset. Even before the New Testament is complete, there are corruptions and perversions. The Nicolaitans come up and they start using Christianity to browbeat people and dominate them.

Nikos, victory. Laos, people. Victory over the people.

But there were heresies and they were branded as heresies. Everybody in the church knew they were heresies. The Gnostics who came and tried to mix Greek philosophy with Christianity and say, oh, don't worry about your body.

You can do what you want with your body. Remember Jesus said, the sin is in the heart and in the mind. So, if you just don't consider anything to be a sin, you can do whatever kind of perversions you want with your body and it's not sinful.

Your spirit is untouched. Live it up now and then have a clean soul. You can exceed and access higher levels of knowledge and become more and more spiritual.

Spirituality through knowledge, through knowing the secrets, the secret handshake, the secret symbols and so on. Gnosticism. It was a heresy.

Christians knew it was a heresy. All the early church fathers knew it was a heresy. We'll talk a little more about that later.

So, basically, you have one kind of Christianity all the way down until, now this is an important date, 1054 A.D. There's one kind of Christianity. Ultimately, it's the Catholic Church, basically. Along about 600 or so, you start kind of consolidating the Pope.

The Church starts declaring itself to be equal with Scripture and it's the Church and the Bible. It's us. We'll help you to God.

You can't get there without us. We're the Church. We'll broker your relationship with God.

We'll be your priests. We'll be your vicar of Christ, your substitute Christ, your ante Christos. We'll do that for you.

So, Catholic Church comes into being about halfway through that period and power gets consolidated in Rome under the Pope. And the Pope has got his little sub-popes, his bishops and his cardinals and his little tree of henchpersons going all the way down to the local assemblies. All the way down to 1054.

1054 A.D., you have what is called the Great Schism, the Great Rift, the Great Divide, the Great Break. There were a bunch of churches in the East and a lot of churches in the West. Western churches are all dominated by Rome.

The Eastern churches wound up consolidating their headquarters in Constantinople. And they finally just said, Boo on you people in Rome. We don't like what you're doing.

We're splitting off. And so, the one Catholic church, Catholic by the way with a small c just means universal. Divides.

Now there are two big church groups. One is the Catholic Church with the Pope in Rome. The other is the Eastern Orthodox Church with its headquarters in Constantinople.

So, you've got those two. Now we're going to go forward another 500 years. And you get into the 16th century, the 1500s.

Now, the Eastern Orthodox, they're still being Eastern Orthodox. They're real heavy on rituals and liturgy and the incarnation of Christ and icons and things. We'll talk about the Eastern Orthodox.

But we're going to focus on the Catholics because we're sort of tracing our genealogy. So, you've got the Catholics for another 500 years under the Pope in Rome. But, what happens in the mid-1500s? You know this.

A man named Martin Luther sparks the Protestant Reformation. Now, he didn't do it single-handedly. There was a great deal of unrest.

There was a great deal of... This is like saying that Martin Luther King single-handedly brought about the desegregation and integration and the emergence of black people from the persecution they endured in our country. He was a leader of a groundswell that had been building for a long time. Same way, Martin Luther back in the 1500s, when he spoke out against the church, a lot of people said, it's about time somebody got us out from under these abuses and this heavy monetary burden that the church has put us under.

So, Martin Luther had a bunch of gripes with the church. And he said, each one of these is a thesis. My thesis is that the church ought not to be charging for indulgences.

The church ought not to be making us pay to get people out of purgatory. The church ought not to do this, ought not to... Well, these ought-not-tos, there were 95 of them. Martin Luther got all fed up.

He was a Catholic priest. Been to seminary. Was a kneeling, praying, bald-spot Catholic priest just with the best of them.

But, he was looking at the Word of God. And he realized that what the church was doing wasn't what he saw in the Word of God. And it really convicted him.

And God, the Holy Spirit was working on him. He said, this just isn't right. So, he sat down and he wrote up these 95 theses.

And he was over there in Germany. And there's a town called Wittenberg. And there's a church in Wittenberg.

And so, he took these, he wrote them all on a big piece of paper and he went down there to the door of the church and he nailed them onto the door. And left them there for the rest of the Catholic guys to come and read. And so, the Wittenberg door has become very famous because that's where Martin Luther really put the flame to the fuse of the Protestant Reformation.

So, this he did in 1517. Protestant Reformation begins. But, that was just the beginning.

There were trials. He kept trying to reconcile. He was trying to work from within.

He wanted the Catholic... Martin Luther didn't want to leave the Catholic Church. He didn't want to quit being a priest. He wanted the church to get fixed.

He wanted them to stop abusing their power and their authority. He wanted to make the church right from within. Well, they didn't want to.

And that's why he eventually had to leave. And he got the Diet of Worms, which sounds horrible, but that's a completely different thing than what it sounds like. So, the Protestantism as a movement really began about 12 years later in 1529.

And that's when there was this book that got published. It was called Protestation. And it was sent to the imperial government in Germany.

And the authors of this book were actually German nobility, German princes. And they wanted freedom to let people make up their own minds. And this was sort of the feudal system.

You've got a nobleman or a prince, and he's got his little fiefdom there. And Germany was broken up into all these little feudal areas. Well, these princes went to the government, and they said, look, we don't want insurrection on our hands.

We don't want to try to ram Catholicism down these people's throat. There's a bunch of them that don't like it. We want the freedom to decide within our own little area what kind of religion is going to be practiced.

We don't want the state dictating one single religion for the whole country. So they got together and published this book based on Martin Luther's objections. It was called Protestation.

And they said, in matters which concern God's honor and salvation and the eternal life of our souls, everyone must stand and give account before God for himself. And this was a radical idea in the time because the church had been telling people for centuries, you come to us. We'll fix it up between you and God.

We'll make sure you get in. You pay us the money, and we'll see what we can do with God. And the princes realized, from Martin Luther and others who were a part of this movement, everyone must stand and give account before God for himself.

That is the essence of the Protestant faith. You are accountable. Remember what I said in the first lesson? You can't just say, well, you know, I believe because that's what mom and dad said.

That's what people told me. I just kind of went with the flow. I'm not responsible.

Yes, you are. You, put your name in the blank, you are accountable before God for what you believe. You will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the judgment and answer for your life and what you choose.

I'm not going to be standing there. You can't say, well, Lord, get him. He'll tell you what I believe.

He can explain it. Sorry. You can call me all you want.

I'm not coming. I've got enough to answer for my own self. You will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and you will answer for what you believe or what you don't believe and what you practice by faith and what you fail to practice by faith.

Jesus Christ, with his nails scarred hands, is going to be talking to you and asking you, what did you do with the salvation I bought for you on the cross? What did you do with the Holy Spirit that I gave you when I left? What did you do with the Word of God that I put in your hands through the ministry of faithful men down through the centuries? What did you do with all of those gifts? Did you consider them valuable? Or did you lay them aside and do something that you thought was more important? You and I will answer to the Lord Jesus for how we treat his Word and his Spirit. And believe me, Jesus Christ takes the way we treat the Holy Spirit very seriously. Do you remember what he said in the Gospels? You can speak a word against the Son of Man and you'll be forgiven.

But if you blaspheme the Holy Spirit, if you belittle and set aside and ignore the Holy Spirit, it's not forgivable. This is why people are going to end up in the lake of fire because the Holy Spirit comes and tells them about the Lord Jesus, and they reject that message. They don't go to hell for their sins.

They don't go to hell for murder or perversion or any of the other horrible crimes you can think of. People go to the lake of fire because God the Holy Spirit comes and tells them the truth and they say, hey, you're lying. I don't believe it.

And if it is true, I don't care. Go away. I've got a better plan.

Remember what it says in Hebrews? People in the Old Testament could die on the testimony of two or three witnesses. That was the law of Moses. If you were observed committing a crime, the two or three witnesses said, yes, I saw him kill that man.

I saw him steal that thing. You could be condemned on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Remember what it says in Hebrews? Of how much more punishment shall he be thought

worthy who tramples the Son of God underfoot and does despot to the Spirit of grace? Despot means to heap spite on something.

What kind of penalty do you think people will be worthy in God's eyes if they trample His Son underfoot, do despot to the Spirit and put His Son to an open shame? That's the question that gets asked in Hebrews. Well, it's critically important to understand what these German princes understood 600 years ago. In matters which concern God's honor, salvation, and the eternal life of our souls, everyone must stand and give account before God for himself.

If you don't remember anything else from this evening, remember that. You will, I will, stand before God and give an account of ourselves. The great thing is, and this is the positive, our life is not over yet.

We know this now. We've got some time to give a good account of ourselves, to make our time count, to make our life count, to take advantage of God's Spirit and God's Word and God's grace and do something that will result in the Lord Jesus looking at us and saying, well done. Way to go.

Come up here and sit with me. Here's a rock that I've written a name on that only you and I know. It grants you access to things that others can't see.

This unlocks doors for you that others cannot enter. I'll tell you what, that white stone with the name written on it is an access pass. The hidden manna that Jesus is going to share with the overcomers, the conversations and the insight that He is going to share are going to be precious beyond rubies, precious beyond gold and silver.

People will crave those, will wish for those. You and I can reach out and accept them for free. In the time that remains to us in this life, all we have to do is accept God's grace.

We've thanked the Lord. We've got time. It is not too late.

It doesn't matter what you've done up to this point. You can take each day that remains in your life. I can take each day that remains in my life and become a person that when we stand and give account to God, it's a good account.

And God says, test passed. Task accomplished. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of your Lord. It's possible. It's not far off.

It's not difficult. It's not like winning the lottery or coming in first at the Olympics. This is something any of us can do.

You can be a teenager and do it. You can be a child and do it. You can be an old person and do it.

Because it's all done in God's power. It's God's spirit, God's word, God's grace. All you have to

do is just make the decisions.

Maintain the viewpoint. Pursue the prize. Paul says, laying aside every weight, the sin that entangles me, forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

That's what this life is about. It's not about being an ist, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian. It's not about how much money did you accumulate, how much professional success did you attain, how many friends did you have, how much stuff was left over when they started totaling up your estate as your body grows cold and moldy in the coffin.

What is life about? It is this evaluation. Everyone must stand and give account. It's a wonderful thing that those Germans... Germany was a hotbed.

It was the center of the world for biblical studies back in these days and in the years that followed. There were no scholars of the Bible like the German scholars. And even at this early date, these princes understood.

You know what? It's between me and God. And the government and the church shouldn't be trying to tell me my business when I have to stand and give an account before God. It's the same with you.

You can't lay it off on somebody else. Don't try to lay it off on me. Don't try to lay it off on your parents or your friends or anybody else.

It's you and God. Well, that is 1529. The Protestant Reformation officially begins in 1529.

Now, how many big Christian groups have you got? You've got the Eastern Orthodox who have sort of a mirror image of the Catholic Church, but it's not the Catholic Church. It's centered in Constantinople. You've got the Roman Catholic Church, so named because its headquarters is in Rome.

And now, as of the 1500s, you have the protestors, the Protestants, the ones who break out of the Roman Catholic Church and say, I've got to stand before God on my own. Well, this freed Christians from a yoke of bondage and being dependent on the Church with its atrophied and encrusted traditions where you couldn't... It was like trying to get water out of a rock to get biblical truth out of the Catholic Church. It just came in little trickles and little tiny bits.

So now, with that out of the way, you had individual interpretation of Scripture. You have some religious freedom. And as soon as there is this freedom and the trappings of the Church are thrown off, what's going to happen? Well, Protestants didn't get all together and say, we're just going to all be happy Protestants who all believe exactly the same thing.

As soon as they threw off the yoke of Catholic dogma, they began to study Scripture for themselves. They were in different locations with different interests, different needs and

different desires. And very soon they began to say, well, I understand the Bible this way.

I understand the Bible this way. And early on, this Protestant Christianity... Remember those German princes? They said, this is in my little fiefdom here. Well, when they got the Church out of the picture, now their Protestant Christianity got tangled up with their civil government.

And many of the governments were composed of Christians and there was this free mix of Christianity and governing power. Well, if you're governing in one place, you're going to have one kind of church. If you're governing in another place, you're going to have another kind of church.

And this sowed the early seeds of the Protestant denominations. So, this is where we're going to leave off for tonight. We're in the middle of the 15th century, late 15th century.

We've got the Eastern Orthodox, we've got the Roman Catholics, and we've got the Protestants. Next week, we're going to see what happens within Protestantism that results in the major denominational groups that we have today. Where did they come from? You'll be able to tell the difference between a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian by the end of next week.

But we have to close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you that the Holy Spirit is present with us to give us insight and understanding.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. And these truths are clearly evident from your word. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will give us insight and give us encouragement as we navigate the challenges of this life and seek to honor you in everything that we do.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.