

Bible Special 06-10-24a

This is Tuesday, October the 24th, 2006. We continue tonight our study looking at the distinctives of the Christian faith. Tonight we're going to be looking specifically at the origin of denominations, Protestant denominations.

Obviously there really aren't any denominations within Catholicism. But let's take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship. Father, thank you for giving us another day and another opportunity to be blessed through spending time together.

We know that our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ sets us apart in the world. And as we seek to understand that uniqueness and that distinctiveness, we pray your blessing on us, that the things we examine will contribute to our faith, our hope, and our love. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. It really is important, as I mentioned in the prayer, that this not just be an academic exercise. It's the one thing that concerns me about doing a study that isn't directly in the text of Scripture is that we wind up not really feeding our souls from God's Word.

So as we look at these distinctives, what we want to be thinking about is this. You are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why do we believe what we believe? How do we gain any confidence that our understanding of Scripture is better, more fruitful, closer to God's will and plan and purpose than somebody who's over there wearing purple robes with fancy decorations and doing a bunch of liturgical, ritualistic gyrations? Should we be over there with the purple robe people, or should we be doing what we're doing? Now, do we care? Some people don't really care. They basically figure it's kind of a social club. It's a good place to meet people.

It's a nice diversion on the weekend to go to church. You get sort of a holy feeling, kind of a habit that I've had for a while, and I enjoy it. This is not satisfactory either.

When we were talking about secular humanism and empiricism and evolution, one of the issues that inevitably arises, and I was thinking of this last night, they're showing the Cosmos series. Have you ever seen that? Carl Sagan, Channel 13 here in Dallas, the PBS station. It was made, what, 30 years ago in the late 70s? Carl Sagan got together with the NPR, PBS people, and put together this series called Cosmos, and it was later published as a book, and I've got the book in there somewhere.

It's an examination of the universe, life on Earth, everything having to do with science and astronomy and physics. They played music by the guy that did the theme for Chariots of Fire, that kind of synthesizer, atmospheric sort of music, and he's also got a lot of Vivaldi and other. The music is good.

I've also got the soundtrack album from Cosmos. But here's the point. This is Carl Sagan's view,

and the view that's popular in science and among those who embrace empiricism for their view of the universe.

Carl Sagan was part of the team that put this plaque on the side of one of the Voyager spacecraft that's got a picture of a couple of naked people and a phonograph record in this gold plaque that if an alien can ever figure out how to construct a turntable, he can play it, and it has, listen, a human being could find that thing. It could drop in the middle of France somewhere, and somebody could pick it up and play it on a known good turntable and not be able to figure it out. There's whale songs.

There's heartbeats. And who knows what that stuff is. I'll bet I could play that soundtrack for you, and you wouldn't be able to identify all the sounds.

I don't know how some bug-eyed alien in some other galaxy is going to figure it out when they may not have ears. Maybe there's no sort of auditory analog type of technology for them to make any sense of it. But Carl Sagan thought this would be a great idea.

So they put all of this information on this plaque, bolted it to the side of Voyager, sent it off, it went past three or four planets, and then off into the blue. And it's going to get hit by some interstellar piece of asteroid or something and get blown into smithereens, and it won't ever make any difference. But these people have these grand ideas that there's somebody else out there.

There's so many millions and billions of stars and galaxies and planets, and there's bound to be life evolving elsewhere. Listen, think about it. Is there life elsewhere in the universe? Yes, absolutely.

There is intelligent life, smarter than us, that's out there. That is a biblical fact. But they're not going to be chasing down the Voyager spacecraft and playing the record that's bolted to the side.

It is the angelic civilization. God's already told us about them. They are already up there watching us, but they don't fly in saucers.

They don't have globe-shaped heads with big black eyes and no chin and crash land out there in Area 51 or anything. They're angels, and they dwell in a dimension that we do not have access to. It's the same dimension where I think our soul or soul and spirit dwell, where God is, where God's throne is.

Well, this goes to your worldview, because if you believe in evolution, if you believe in empiricism, if you believe that it's a happy accident that some chemicals got together and started bubbling and stewing around and turned into living goo, and the living goo oozed around and became something more and more complex, and ultimately, bingo, here's human beings, what is the point of your life? Think about this. Let's all assume for the moment. Everybody kind of take a little journey of the imagination.

There is no God. There is no heaven. Jesus is not coming back.

There is no dwelling in any other dimensions, or there's no God in the past, there's no God in the future. All it is, you have popped up and stuck your head into the conscious world in your infancy, and you're going to live this little life looking around, trying to make sense of everything, and then you're going to die, and when you die, you are dead meat. Your neural activity is going to cease, you're going to lose consciousness, and it's the big sleep.

It's the big chill. It's the long dirt nap. It's nothing.

It's nowhere. You disappear, and you are no more. There is no spiritual element at all.

So now, with that as a point of view, as a perspective, what should you try to get done in this life? What is the point of life? What shall we do? We're just going to be here for a little while. Well, a lot of people say, well, I want to do good for my fellow man. I want to be remembered.

I want people to know that I was here. I want to make my mark. Why? What good does that do you? Julius Caesar and Napoleon and people have made their mark.

Hitler made his mark. Jeffrey Dahmer, serial killers. People have been famous and infamous all down through history.

But if they are unconscious, dead, blown away, gone, and are no more, what difference does it make if they're famous or not? That some other momentary, temporary little creature is going to remember them before it winks out. After a certain period of thousands of years passes and our sun swells up and incinerates the earth and people haven't figured out how to fly away somewhere else, ultimately the whole human race is going to die. Ultimately, I can't remember the name of the story, but Isaac Asimov wrote a story.

I can't remember if it was called Memory or what, but it went on and on and on, and eventually people keep improving technology and getting further and further away. The solar system goes out and by then they've gone to others and bodies start wearing out, but they transmit themselves into computers and the computers get more and more complex. But ultimately the whole universe goes down to absolute zero and the last little thought winks out.

Well, then what? It's difficult to really come up with a meaningful purpose in life. The default that most everybody comes up with is the old eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Let's have some fun because I could get hit by a bus tomorrow, so might as well find some kind of sensual pleasure, some sort of stimulation, something to make me happy and give me a thrill.

Let me ride a roller coaster or a bungee jump or add to my butterfly collection. Whatever it is that people enjoy that gives them a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. By the way, I saw somebody's butterfly collection and it was just stunning.

I forget where and when I saw it. But that is not a bad hobby if you've got nothing better to do. You do get a chance to see the wide variety of just one type of God's creation.

Here's the point. We're talking about denominations and there's a lot of variety. Why is that? It's a thing that is common to man.

Everybody is trying to figure out what's important. What is the most important thing? Is it real important to be organized? Is it real important to have a sense of mystical connection with a higher reality? Is it really important to have a good time? Why do you think there are charismatic churches, churches where they wave hands and sing songs and chant and stomp and flop around on the floor and get into holy laughter and jabber away in tongues and have all kinds of hysterics? Why do you think they do that? They have gone down the road of experience. Let's have an experience.

In a more moderate way, a lot of Protestant denominations have gone for the praise and worship service where you go down there and you really get wafted halfway to heaven on a wave of emotion. Orchestras play. People say inspiring things.

There's audiovisual, multimedia, computer-driven five screens. It's like going down to the IMAX to go to some churches today. Sometime when we have to cancel because my voice is gone or something, you've got to pick the biggest church in the Metroplex and go visit on Sunday and just be stunned at the content.

You can see if there's anything there. But look at the presentation. It's mind-numbing.

You just wouldn't believe it until you saw it. Well, that's an approach. That's a pattern.

But when all is said and done, there is a God in this heaven. The Lord Jesus is coming back and He is going to ask you and He is going to ask me, what did you do with the time I gave you on this earth? Every one of us, however young, however old, we're going to be held accountable for how we spend our time. This time is like money in the bank.

It's like funds that have been given. Jesus told the story of the servants who were given these pieces of gold. The Master said, take these pieces of gold and go do something with them.

They were called talents. A talent of gold, which was quite a bit. Then He went away and He came back and He said, what did you do with what I gave you? That's what our time is.

That's what our life is, our days. There are certain things that we are called upon to do. We have jobs.

We have school. We have chores. We have responsibilities.

We have obligations. We have liberty. And it's a good thing to enjoy entertainment and recreation.

This is a part of life. But ultimately, we will give an account. I would already be horrified if some angel in the bookkeeping department in heaven totals up all the hours I've spent watching television.

I'm going to be ashamed at the judgment because that time is, other than providing sermon illustrations, largely wasted. It's just bubble gum for the brain. It's chewing gum for the mind.

The clock ticks by for an hour or for 43 minutes plus commercials while this thing goes by. And it's just, well, okay. And if you're sick, if you're bed fast, if there's nothing constructive to do, that's fine.

But there's so many more productive pursuits than chewing away the time. When I'm an old crippled up geezer somewhere, I'm going to wish that I had saved the TV watching for when I was an old crippled up geezer while I still had my faculties and my abilities, that I had done something of more lasting value. Nothing wrong with TV.

I watch it. I love it. But we have to keep these things in perspective, don't we? We have to keep them in proportion, always with an eye on the judgment.

Now, denominations, that's our subject. But why are there so many? People say, your Bible is screwed up. That's why there's so many denominations.

Nobody can figure out the Bible so you get all these groups. No, no, no. Don't let anyone tell you that.

Don't let anybody make an argument out of that. There's not a thing in the world wrong with the Bible. The Bible is alive and powerful.

It's God's Word. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction, and righteousness. It is clear.

It is connected. It is understandable. If you receive those words and lay them up, if you seek them like silver and search for them like treasure, if you hide them in your heart, if you apply your heart to understanding, you will understand it and you'll understand it correctly.

The reason we have all of these denominations is not God's fault. It's our fault. Because we don't pay attention and we don't have good priorities and we look for the wrong things in our Christianity.

And people say, well, I'm going to have a kind of Christianity where we have a lot of fun. Other people who feel guilty say, I'm going to have a kind of Christianity that's very stern and drab and dull and makes me suffer because then I'll feel like God will be happy because I suffered for my sins. I feel like when something's done for me, I should do something for somebody else.

So I'm going to get into a workaholic kind of a church where you go out and do a bunch of stuff. And that makes me feel better. Someone else says, I like the Christianity as a stretch version

and I'm just going to go somewhere where somebody else does everything and I just get happy.

That's why we have these denominations. Now, if you remember last time, what kind of church was there for the first millennium, the first thousand years after Christ? We had one church which has become the Roman Catholic Church. But there was that church.

Whenever they had a get-together to figure out what is and isn't Christianity, it was one church. And they would get together. They had councils where they would come together and say, look, here's somebody saying this.

Is this right or not? And they would make a decision. And that was the decision for the entire church. They began to set boundaries and definitions and understandings of what Scripture means.

And this pertained all the way through the first thousand years, down to about 1054. Then you had the big schism. And what happened in the big schism? Do you remember? You ended up with the Orthodox Church, the Eastern Orthodox group.

And where did this come from? Well, it actually has its roots several hundred years earlier. In the 400's A.D., you may have heard of a fellow named Constantine. Well, Constantine was the Roman emperor.

And he integrated Christianity into secular government. And they were kind of intermingled and intermixed. He made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Well, when he got old and got ready to check out, he had two sons. And this division of power, one of them was over in the west and the other was over in the east. And this began a conflict that went on for another 500 years or so.

And eventuated in 1054 in the people in the east saying, we are sick of you people in the west trying to tell us what to do, particularly the Pope, so we're leaving. And they split off. But up to that point, at that point they still share pretty much all the same doctrines and so on.

But they said this whole thing of the Pope doesn't work for us. The first Pope, Leo and so on, was 600 and something A.D. And he put a lot of the stuff in that is still present in the Catholic Church in terms of the justification for the Pope as the vicar of Christ and as the head of the church based on Peter being called the Rock and the apostolic succession. And he made a lot of the original arguments that formed the foundation for Pope-dom.

Popishness. The Popemobile. All of that stuff comes from way back in Pope Leo.

He didn't know it, and he didn't have one, but there wouldn't be one if not for him. So 1054, and these two groups got so upset with each other that Pope Leo IX excommunicated the big cheese guy in Constantinople. Because you remember, Constantine moved the seat of the

Roman Empire, the capital city of the Roman Empire, Constantine moved it from Rome to Constantinople, which was further east.

Well, the church kept their headquarters in Rome, but of course a lot of it got tangled up with the government in Constantinople, and hence you had these two spheres of power. And they were snipping and biting and arguing with one another. And so 1054 they split.

So the Pope excommunicates the Patriarch in Constantinople, and so the Patriarch declared the Pope anathema. If you excommunicate me, I excommunicate you back. And so they just split.

Condemned the Pope. So ever since then, this is when you officially have the Roman Catholic Church centered in Rome. As of 1054, it's kind of the church at large or the Catholic Church until 1054.

But after that, it's the Roman Catholic Church. That's why it's called Roman Catholic. Because they centered their stuff in Rome.

All the rest of the people said, no, we're in Constantinople. So they became the Greek Orthodox Church. Eastern Orthodox Greek.

We'll explain those terms here in a minute. Well, they almost reunited when they started doing the Crusades. About 100 years later, around 1200 or so, the Crusades are over, and the Crusaders ended up getting so excited about going and fighting the Muslims and trying to take back Jerusalem.

Then they went over to Constantinople and they sacked it. Well, that tore it for good. Then there wasn't going to be any reconciliation.

So the Crusades almost brought the two halves of the church back together. But ultimately, when the Crusaders went and burned Constantinople, that kind of tore that whole idea up. So recently, I say recently, within my lifetime, 40 years ago or so, the two halves of the church sort of reconciled.

This was Pope Paul, back in the mid-60s, had a declaration where, it was Pope Paul VI, made an official declaration where he reversed the excommunication of the Orthodox crowd. He said, we take it back. We were just kidding.

You're not really excommunicated after all. And the anathema pronouncement on the Pope in Rome was reversed off by the current, at that time in the 60s, patriarch of Constantinople. His name was Athenagoras.

So Pope Paul VI and Athenagoras in 1964 said, okay, let's be friends, and they reversed it off. Now, they're still separate entities, but they're not officially mad at each other anymore. Now, what are the differences? Because starting in 1054, you have two big branches of the church.

What's the real difference? Well, there is a lot of emphasis on doctrine in the Orthodox Church.

This is their heritage. They recognize the seven ecumenical councils that took place before the split.

There were seven big major church councils. Now, what were those? The first one was fairly early. It was the Council of Nicaea in 325.

You might want to write these down because everybody goes back to the councils, whether you're Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic. Everybody has to take these councils into account because these are the things that really defined early Christianity and also, pay attention now, also defined what is not Christianity. These councils said, you know what, that right there, that is not Christianity.

And one of the things that got labeled not Christianity is Gnosticism. The Gnostics, the ones who said, you can get this mystical secret knowledge and get close to God and you've got to get the secret handshake and come back in the back room and we'll whisper in your ear and tell you these things. The Gnostics are the ones who wrote things like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, and a lot of other spurious writings.

And when the church got together, they said, look, we're the church and we have the teaching of the apostles and this stuff that these people over here are saying, these Gnostics, this is not what the apostles taught. This is not what we learned from John and Peter and James and Paul and certainly not from the Lord Jesus. So, that right there, that is not Christianity and if you find any of those writings, get rid of them.

Get them out of your church, get them out of your house, get them out of your town because that is heresy. That is incorrect nonsense. And so, they had this Council of Nicaea.

They had heresies like Arianism and we talked about some of these when we were talking about the early cults. Quartodecimanism and things like that. Basically, one of the big things they affirmed is the Trinity.

There are many sects and cults who don't believe in the Trinity. The Father, Son and Spirit. Well, this was ironed out in the first Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D. So, guess who does not recognize the Council of Nicaea? Anybody who doesn't believe in the Trinity.

These are your Unitarians. Unitarians don't believe in the Trinity. Your Mormons.

Mormons don't believe in the Council of Nicaea or the Nicene Creed. Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in the Trinity. Don't believe Jesus is the Son of God and so on.

So, they don't recognize that council. Why? Because that council defines them out of Christianity. Can't be a Christian and not believe in the Trinity.

Well, that's Nicaea, 325 A.D. Now, the Nicene Creed is fairly short. Some of us have actually memorized it. I memorized it at one point.

Let me just read it to you. This is the whole Nicene Creed. So, don't fade out on me now.

This is not sleepy time. See if you can follow the major points. Because this was the first attempt outside of Scripture to say you know what? This is what Christians believe.

So, see if you believe these things. See if you can subscribe to the Nicene Creed. I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

I see some of you sinking along with me. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, eternally begotten from the Father. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father, through whom all things came into being.

Remember in John 1? Without Him, there's not anything made that was made. Who because of us men, and because of our salvation, came down from heaven and became incarnate. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary, becoming man.

For our sake, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. On the third day, He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And His kingdom will have no end. And the Holy Spirit.

We've got the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. Now, let me just make a note right there.

Did you hear that? The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father. That's the original Nicene Creed. We'll come back and talk about that in a minute.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son, He is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

That's the whole thing. Not bad, is it? Pretty close. I could quibble with one or two little things.

In other words, I'm not sure I would say that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ never ends. Because it does. The Bible says it does.

And all things go back to the Father near the kingdom of the Father. Most of those things are pretty good. Well, that is the Nicene Creed, 325.

Creed number 1 of 7 that the Catholic Church accepts and the Orthodox Church accepts and most Protestant denominations acknowledge. Maybe not assigning it the same authority that the Orthodox and Catholic Churches do. But we look to that as an early formulation of what the

Bible teaches.

So, thing to remember from the first lesson tonight, what is the first formulation of what Christianity is? It's the Nicene Creed. The Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D. You need to know this. This is a part of your heritage.

This is a part of history. And if you're going to talk intelligently about Christianity, you need to know how it came to be defined and understood as it is today. Well, we're already out of time for our first lesson.

So, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to continue to see what these councils were and then what it is that was a big part of the split between the Catholics and the Orthodox.