

Scripture Reading 1: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13 (New American Standard Bible 1995)

¹Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ...

¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Scripture Reading 2: Romans 15:5-7 (NASB95)

⁵Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Today, I am taking a break from my sermon series in 1st Peter and I am doing a one-time sermon on a topic that has been on my mind for a long time. I have mentioned this topic to a number of my brothers and sisters at OIC and they have encouraged me to go ahead and share my thoughts with you all. You might remember that at the beginning of this year, I did a three-part sermon series on the theme of the identity of Osaka International Church as a Protestant, evangelical, and interdenominational church. I outlined what it means to be Protestant, what it means to be evangelical, and I also described how we here at OIC have come from a variety of denominations, and yet we fellowship together and seek to be disciples together, all of us recognizing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. A few of my brothers and sisters here told me that they wish to understand better the issue of the differing denominations within Christianity. Indeed, it can be a confusing picture. Why so many denominations? Why so many differing expressions of Christianity? What has happened to the “unity of the faith” that we just read about in our Scripture Reading? Today, I am embarking on an ambitious endeavor to explain all of this to you. Well, not all of it – but I hope to give you a broad picture of what I call “The Denominational Landscape.” In fact, that is the title of my message today: “The Denominational Landscape.” To do this, I have to delve back into historical theology, describing some crucial theological discussions in the early centuries of the Christian era, moving on to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, and concluding with the situation of our current day. And I plan to do this all in about 45 minutes.

I don't want today's message to sound like a history lecture. On the contrary, it is a plea from my heart for Christian brothers and sisters to show love and acceptance and toleration across denominational lines. Let me read again some verses you just heard a few minutes ago in our Scripture Reading: Romans 15:5-7 – “⁵Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” Here the Apostle Paul prays that God may grant the Ephesian Christians the ability to “be of the same mind with one another” that they “may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and that they would “accept one another, just as Christ also accepted” each one of them. I pray that my Christian brothers and sisters at this current time can also achieve this. Note that Paul says that it is “God who gives perseverance and encouragement” to grant that this happen. As with everything in the Christian life, it is God, through His Holy Spirit, who empowers us to do what He

desires that we do and to obey the commands He has given us to follow. The unity Paul prays for here is achievable if we are diligent and disciplined to let God do His work in us.

For as long as I have been a part of Osaka International Church (33 years), the front page of our Sunday bulletin has quoted this verse of Scripture: Ephesians 2:19 (NKJV) – “¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” I think this is a very appropriately chosen verse for the OIC fellowship, which is comprised of Christian brothers and sisters from a wide variety of countries, cultures, and denominations: we are not strangers and foreigners in this fellowship – rather, we are brothers and sisters, fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of God’s household. And when I read the verses that follow after verse 19, I find them instructive.

Let’s read Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJV) – “¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

The Christian church is the household of God, made up of all men and women who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets – that is, this household is built on the gospel message proclaimed by the apostles and prophets in the New Testament, a message revealed by God, with an evangelistic endeavor fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the chief cornerstone of this foundation is Jesus Christ Himself. If we are not centered on Him, we go astray and deviate from the right path to God. In verses 21 and 22, we members of the church are described as the stones of the building that are being fitted together to build this structure, one stone at a time, one Christian convert at a time, generation after generation, continuing to build the church until Jesus returns.

Let’s go to chapter 4 of the book of Ephesians, verses 4-7 – “⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Note the unity described here: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father.

So, what has happened to this unity? Why so many denominations? Why so many differences of opinion on doctrinal matters?

Let me share with you a few brief observations. Here is my main thesis: Sometimes a new denomination comes into existence because an important but neglected biblical principle is rediscovered and re-emphasized. Later in today’s message, I will show you some examples of this.

Here is a second thesis: It seems to me that denominations often are like cultures – certain frameworks of thinking are entrenched in a population of people and they have a hard time interacting with people from another frame of mind. Most denominations have Jesus Christ as their firm foundation, but the ways in which they express their faith have taken some divergent tracks. In my eyes, these divergent tracks that different Christian groups have taken look like differing cultures, differing mindsets, differing emphases, and we need some tolerance and cross-cultural communication in order to interact with brothers and sisters from another denomination.

My third thesis is a negative thesis: Oftentimes, wrong ideas and wrong practices have become commonplace within a particular denomination, along with complacency, leading to a spiritually dead system. If we don’t remain disciplined and if we don’t pass on a practice of discipline to the

next generation, any Christian group can end up going this route. And remember what I said in my previous sermons about the three chief enemies of the Christian life: the world, the flesh, and the devil – all three of these have been at work to deaden the effectiveness of the church.

And that leads me right back to my main thesis: Sometimes a new denomination comes into existence because an important but neglected biblical principle is rediscovered and re-emphasized. Christians desiring a full expression of a living, vibrant Christian faith often have to turn their backs on an old, stale group that has lost its way.

In today's message, I won't say much about my negative thesis or my second thesis, but I will provide some history of the importance placed on some key, fundamental doctrines over the course of time.

Let me look one more time at Romans 15:5 – “⁵Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus.” We must be “of the same mind,” but we must have that mind conformed “according to Christ Jesus,” according to sound, biblical theology that comes from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

And let's look again at Ephesians 2:20-21, which describes the Christian church as “²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.” Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the true church. If Jesus is forgotten or ideas about Him are distorted, we do not have true Christianity.

With Jesus Christ as our cornerstone and the teaching of the apostles and prophets as our foundation, I am going to draw a picture for you – a simple, perhaps overly simplistic picture – of what I will call basic Orthodox Christian Theology. I'm showing a box on the screen and I've got it labelled “Orthodox Christian Theology.” Notice that I have some red lines surrounding my box. These are my firm red lines – what is inside is orthodox Christianity, and what is outside we call heresy. Later, I will describe various denominations that exist within this box – they have some differing opinions on some doctrines, but all accept the fundamental truth about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation that He provided for us. I am also going to describe some groups that are outside this box, that have gotten the message of Jesus Christ seriously wrong.

Let me define the word “orthodox.” This comes from the words “orthos” and “doxa.” *Orthos* means *straight* or *right* (*correct*). *Doxa* means *teaching* or *doctrine*. Orthodox means the right or straight doctrine. What I am seeking to describe here is the right or straight doctrine about Christ and Christian teaching.

What are some examples of basic orthodox Christian theology? Let me quote a few verses as an introduction. The Apostle Paul says this in 1 Timothy 1:15a – “¹⁵It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” He says more in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 – “³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” And 2 Corinthians 5:19 – “¹⁹Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” It was God's plan to send Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners through His sacrificial death on the cross for our sins and then to be raised from the dead. Let me share two more verses. In John 10:30, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” In response to Him, the Jewish leaders said in verse 33, “You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.” They understood that Jesus claimed to be God. When we read the entirety of Scripture, we learn that Jesus is God, that He is God become man – that's the doctrine of the incarnation. And the

Holy Spirit is God – we have the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are the basic fundamentals of standard Christian theology: the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead, proving His victory over sin and death. There are many more aspects of orthodox theology that I could highlight, but I offer you these thoughts as a beginning point.

Within this box of orthodox Christian theology, there are many denominations. I will describe some of these a little later. But right now, in the next few minutes, I would like to describe some groups that are outside of the red lines of my box on the screen. These are groups that we say are heretical – they teach false doctrine about Christ and the Christian life. In the early centuries of the Christian era, there were a number of heresies that denied some key aspects of Christian teaching and even denying key truths about Jesus Christ, such as the doctrine of the incarnation, that God became man.

<u>Basic Orthodox Christian Theology</u> The Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) The Divinity of Christ / The Incarnation Christ's atoning sacrifice for sins / The resurrection of Christ	<u>Heresies</u> Gnosticism Modalism etc. Arianism
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I would like to mention one group from the fourth century A.D. that posed a very serious challenge to orthodox Christianity. This was the heresy of Arianism, taught by a Christian priest named Arius. He did not believe in the full divinity of Christ and his viewpoint was becoming increasingly popular. This challenge led to the calling of a church-wide conference of bishops in AD 325 known as the Council of Nicaea. This council led to the formation of what we call the Nicene Creed. The creed makes clear that we believe in One God who exists eternally as three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This creed has remained the most fundamental expression of the doctrine of the Trinity and has been affirmed and reaffirmed again and again by generations of Christian theologians, all through the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformation, and on down to the modern era.¹

Any group calling itself Christian but not affirming the basic doctrines that I have stated as Orthodox Christian Theology are groups that we say are not truly Christian. In our modern day, let me mention three groups that we do not consider Christian: these are the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormon church, and the Unification Church. The Jehovahs Witnesses can be described as semi-Arian, since they deny the Trinity and the full divinity of Christ. The Mormon church and the Unification Church have some very strange theology. I mention these three groups today because many non-Christians and even some Christians are not aware that those three groups are not considered Christian by the majority of orthodox Christian denominations. You may have noticed that some Protestant, evangelical churches in Japan have a little statement at the bottom of their

¹ The Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into 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. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped 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. Amen. [From *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979]

public literature and on their websites stating that they have no association with those three groups. This is a very important distinction to make.

Basic Orthodox Christian Theology

The Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)

The Divinity of Christ / The Incarnation

Christ's atoning sacrifice for sins / The resurrection of Christ

(Protestant Denominations: Lutheran church, Reformed churches, Church of England (Anglican), Presbyterian church, Methodist church, Baptist churches, Mennonite church, Brethren churches, etc., etc.)

Modern Heresies

Jehovah's Witnesses

Mormon Church

Unification Church

etc.

Now, let me move on the heart of today's message: differing Christian denominations. Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Mennonites, etc., etc. I spent a great deal of time explaining the fundamental orthodox Christian theology because, actually, despite all the divisions that we see within the Christian church, there are, actually, a lot of important issues on which we do agree. Indeed, despite the criticisms I hear one denomination say against another, I also hear of friendships and cooperation across denominational lines.

In the remainder of today's message, I would like to give you a little history lesson: an historical storyline of the denominational landscape as I see it. I love history and I love the Scriptures and I have studied both for as long as I can remember. Of course, my storyline has to begin with the early centuries of the Christian era. At that time, the Roman Empire was in decline and it divided itself into western and eastern halves, with the capital of the eastern half situated at the city of Constantinople. The churches in the western half of the Roman empire and the rest of western Europe eventually were incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church, with the bishop of Rome considered the leader of the church and since that time the bishop of Rome has been known as "the pope." In the eastern half of the empire, the churches in that area became known as the Eastern Orthodox family of churches: the Greek Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc., etc.

As the history of the Middle Ages progressed, certain doctrines and practices developed that go beyond what the Bible clearly states what we are supposed to believe and do in the Christian life. A lot of doctrines developed with little scriptural support for them and they were later rejected by the Protestants. Meanwhile, these churches developed various kinds of religious practices which became very burdensome to the people and became a system of working for your righteousness or working for your salvation. In the late Middle Ages, some Christian theologians began writing against all these required practices, men such as John Wycliffe in England and Jan Hus in Bohemia. Then in the 16th century, a monk named Martin Luther was trying very hard to earn God's favor by doing all of these religious practices to best of his ability, but found repeated failure. Then one of his mentors advised him to "contemplate God's grace." And then Luther discovered a verse that changed his life. It was Romans 1:17 (NIV) – "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'." Righteousness that is acceptable to God comes not from rigorous religious practices but simply by faith. In fact, our lives are to be lived by faith. This is the truth that sparked the Protestant Reformation and soon many more Christians and theologians across Europe were supporting the movement.

I told you near the beginning of today's message that my main thesis is that sometimes a new denomination comes into existence because an important but neglected biblical principle is rediscovered and re-emphasized. This rediscovery and renewed emphasis on the principle of salvation by faith alone, preached by Wycliffe and Hus and Luther, gave birth to the Protestant Reformation. As the Protestant movement progressed, much of northern Germany and the

Scandinavian countries adopted the Lutheran approach to theology and broke away from the Roman Catholic church.

In Switzerland, there was a parallel movement, led by such people as Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and John Calvin and William Farel in Geneva. These churches became known as Reformed churches and their theology was also emphasized in the Netherlands. Even though the Lutheran churches moved significantly away from the theology of Rome, they retained some flavor of the old liturgical worship of the mediaeval era. Meanwhile, the Reformed churches moved dramatically away from those liturgical practices and emphasized strong preaching through the whole Bible. John Calvin was notable for preaching through whole books of the Bible, the method still followed by many evangelical churches today, such as ours.

As I mentioned before, during the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic church developed numerous doctrines and practices that were not delineated clearly in the Bible. The Protestant Reformers rejected everything that could not be supported from the Scripture, and there was a lot of problematic material that the Reformers rejected. A lot. One of the most problematic issues had to do with how the Communion service was viewed. This is a complicated topic and I don't have time to discuss it today, but if you would like to learn more about Catholic and Protestant views on the Communion service, you could have a look at the sermon I did last March, which was Part 3 of my series on the Identity of Osaka International Church and which dealt with the two main ceremonies of the Christian church: baptism and communion.

It is sad that with the two most important ceremonies of the Christian church, there is much difference of opinion and division among different Christian groups. Communion should be bringing us together, but unfortunately, it often separates denominations from each other. Likewise the issue of baptism. Some denominations limit baptism to only those persons who make a profession of Christian faith, while other denominations will baptize the infants of Christian believers. There are no clear examples of the baptism of infants in the New Testament; however, by the end of the second century AD, churches often did baptize infants, and this became the standard practice in most churches until the 16th century.

Is there any legitimacy to baptizing infants? Well, Colossians 2:11-12 is rather interesting. There, the Apostle Paul makes a parallel between circumcision and baptism. Circumcision in the Old Testament was a sign given of the covenant made between God and the people of Israel. They circumcised their infant sons eight days after birth. If there is a parallel between circumcision and baptism, then now that we live in the era of the New Covenant, couldn't baptism be regarded as the sign of this New Covenant and wouldn't it be legitimate for Christian parents in the Christian community to baptize their infants? You may or may not agree with such reasoning, but for the people coming from these denominations that practice infant baptism, that is a part of their mindset. Do you remember what I said earlier about denominations looking to me like different cultures with different frames of mind? Those churches that practice infant baptism have their reasons for doing so, and they have their ways of looking at Scripture which lead them to believe that this is a legitimate practice. These people are Bible-believing Christians. We might not agree with them on this issue, but they are our brothers and sisters and I still wish to embrace them as such.

Let me return to my historical overview of denominations. I would like to describe for you two strands of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. One is called the "Magisterial Reformation," so-called because it was the magistrates – the political leaders of cities, regions, and states – which embraced the Reformation and made it the majority expression of Christianity in their location. Such churches include the Lutheran church, Reformed churches, Anglican church, and some offspring of these churches in later centuries, such as the Presbyterians and Methodists. They all continued the practice of infant baptism.

The other strand of the Reformation is called the “Radical Reformation,” which resisted state control and wanted to follow the Bible according to the ways that they themselves determined was the correct biblical teaching. These Radical Reformers tended to adopt what is called Believers Baptism, the idea that only people who make their own profession of faith should be baptized. Such groups include the Swiss Brethren and the Mennonites. These groups were so passionate to follow the Bible according to their own conscience that they often came into conflict with the state church, both Protestant and Catholic, leading to persecution. In fact, some of the Radical Reformers were very radical indeed and in their enthusiasm, they went far outside biblical standards in unhealthy ways. But for the more sober-minded groups like the Mennonites, there is much to admire about their passion, and many of their approaches to Scripture and the Christian life are reflected in today’s evangelical churches. Because they shunned state control of church life, many of these churches organized themselves as independent congregations, with the church members exercising control of church government. There are strengths and weaknesses in such a system – one important strength is that each church member is made to be responsible for making sure their spiritual life is in tune with biblical teaching and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Many churches in this strand of Christianity follow a church government of congregational rule – in Europe, America, and our form of church government here at OIC.

Let me move on in my storyline to Great Britain. The Church of Scotland embraced a presbyterian form of government and the Reformed theology of the Swiss reformation. The Presbyterians have an admirable form of church government in which local congregations have some control over their church life but at the same time there is a system of accountability wherein the various churches are held accountable to each other so that they do not stray from accepted doctrine and practice.

Meanwhile, in England the story of the church is rather unique. The Church of England broke away from the Roman Catholic church, but they did so in a way that was very different than what happened on the continent of Europe. The Church of England tried to steer a “Middle Way” between Protestantism and Catholicism. They kept some aspects of Catholic ceremony in their services, but embraced a Reformed theology. Some people in the Church of England were unhappy at what they considered to be Catholic practices: these people became known as Puritans, because they wanted to purify the Church of England from all remnants of Catholic ideas, but they were not very successful. There is much to admire about the Puritans. They were serious students of the Bible, even the Hebrew Scriptures, and they had a deep theology of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Puritans had a profound influence on the culture and politics of 17th-century England. Many of the Puritans went to the American colonies and had a profound influence there as well.

Meanwhile, Puritan writings had an influence on a man in Germany named Philipp Jakob Spener. Inspired by these writings, Spener sought to bring renewed spiritual life to what he saw was a spiritually dead Lutheran church. Through his advocacy of what were called “pious gatherings,” he sought to enliven church life by involving lay people in active Bible study and service. You could say that these “pious gatherings” are the forerunner of what today we call small group Bible studies. Philipp Spener wrote a book entitled “Pious Wishes” (*Pia Desideria*) and his movement became known as Pietism. There is much I admire about this movement and I plan someday to tell you more about it.

The Pietist movement influenced a group of refugees in the region of Moravia and gave birth to the Moravian church. This was a very missionary-minded church and they sent missionaries abroad, one of the earliest Protestant groups to do so.

Meanwhile, in the 18th century, a priest from the Anglican Church (the Church of England) named John Wesley was greatly influenced by the Moravians that he met. He was converted to a truly born-again faith in one of the Moravian meetings in a chapel on Aldersgate Street in London. This was a landmark event in the history of evangelicalism, because John Wesley was the leading figure in a movement known as Methodism. He and his friend George Whitefield were evangelists that were greatly used of God to preach the good news throughout England and they had a major impact on the spiritual life and social life of England in the 18th and 19th centuries. I have a great deal of admiration for the Methodist Church and their evangelistic and social endeavors.

In the late 19th century in the middle of the United States, a Bible study led by a Methodist minister was studying the book of Acts and they concluded that all of the activities of the Holy Spirit that they saw in Acts ought to be part of the church today, including speaking in tongues and miraculous healings. Not long after that, several people in the church received the gift of speaking in tongues and this practice spread to other places – most notably, to Los Angeles. There in 1906 was the famous Azusa Street Revival, where many Christian pastors and lay people began speaking in tongues. It was like a new Pentecost, as seen in Acts chapter 2. Thus was born the Pentecostal churches. In the 1960s, the practice of speaking in tongues crossed denominational lines and some people in the older denominations also began this practice. Thus was born the Charismatic movement, which gets its name from the Greek word *charisma*, meaning “a gracious gift,” which we also call a spiritual gift – you see this word *charisma* in 1 Corinthians 12 and other places. Groups such as the Calvary Chapel family of churches were born at this time. These supernatural gifts such as tongues and healings have been highly controversial in the 20th century and many Bible scholars have tried to show from Scripture that the so-called “sign gifts” such as tongues were a temporary manifestation in the first century church and are no longer needed after the books of the New Testament were written and we now have the completed Bible for guiding our Christian lives.

I am going to close my sermon today with some personal reflections on the denominational landscape that I see. I grew up in the 1960s in the suburbs south of Los Angeles where new housing was being built and churches of all kinds decorated the landscape. My mother brought her kids to the Lutheran church, not because it was her denominational background but because that church had the best Sunday School program in our town. I am extremely grateful for the wonderful foundation I received at the Lutheran church. Later, when I was a teenager, our family moved to San Diego and we attended a church from a completely different denomination. One day at that church, one lady told us about her friend who belonged to a Lutheran church and was therefore obviously not a Christian. I was stunned to hear such a judgment made. I know there are different types of churches with different emphases and differing levels of spiritual life, but to hear somebody say that people in another church aren’t Christian was a shock to me.

When my twin brother and I went away to college in Los Angeles, we were introduced to Grace Community Church, where John MacArthur was pastor. We were in awe of his fine Bible teaching from the pulpit, verse by verse teaching through the books of the Bible. He many times pointed out the Greek words in the verses he preached on and he really illuminated the Word of God in dramatic ways. I was young and idealistic at the time, and I felt that if we could all just go back to the original Greek, we could erase our denominational differences. But then I noticed that even people who knew Greek were coming to different conclusions on various doctrines – people I knew to be Charismatic or Presbyterian or Baptist. And I noticed that God was using these Christians who came from differing denominations. Indeed, as you read church history, you see God using men and women from a wide variety of denominations, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Billy Graham, John MacArthur, Tim Keller, and others. God still works through us even when we have imperfect understanding of His Word, the Bible. Denominations continue to exist and I have learned to live with the denominational landscape that I see. For the most part, people remain faithful to the Christian heritage in which they were brought up, and that has its positive aspects. In

my mid-20s, I often felt despondent at the divisions of Christianity, but now I have accepted the landscape and I seek tolerance and cooperation across denominational lines.

I started today's message with an exposition of the primary, foundational doctrines of the Christian church. All the denominations I have mentioned believe in these orthodox Christian doctrines: who God is, who Jesus is, and the way of salvation. There is much that we agree on. Let's embrace one another as brothers and sisters despite differences on other matters.

Let me close by reading Ephesians 4:11-13 – “¹¹And He [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”